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Editorial



In an era marked by significant global challenges, there is an urgent need for transformative research and practice. This special edition of Phoenix Scholar explores the cutting-edge advancements that are transforming our understanding of the world and driving innovative solutions. From research discoveries to pioneering social interventions, the articles within these pages showcase the power of research to catalyze positive change. We delve into the connection between theory and practice, examining how thorough inquiry can guide effective action, and vice versa.

In this edition, we explore key themes, such as implementing transformative strategies to support and retain students and faculty in higher education, cultivating student career readiness, and enhancing online education. We also discuss the influence of Artificial Intelligence on learning, underscoring the need to ethically navigate challenging situations as research and innovation push boundaries. Furthermore, we spotlight transformative inquiry as a way to nurture human potential and review the landscape of organizational leadership and strategies for enhancing leaders' decision-making in the postmodern era.

We also explore barriers to enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion and addressing gender disparity in the workplace. Furthermore, we discuss transformative research in healthcare education, K-12 education, and the resilience of African American male students in high school. We also delve into the ethical issues and environmental sustainability related to transforming the supply chain and compare indicators of the entrepreneurial ecosystem between India and China. Finally, we conclude with a book review of "What Happened to You" exploring practical strategies for overcoming adversity and fostering personal growth.

Join us on this journey of exploration and discovery. Through understanding the latest developments in transformative research and practice, we can collectively work towards a more just, improved, and sustainable future.

Sincerely,

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Retaining Non-Traditional Online Students: Bridging the Gap between Transformative Research and Real World Practice

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Abstract

Research suggests complex factors contribute to first-year student retention and successful degree completion in online higher educational institutions. Availability of support may develop students' self-confidence, strengthen self-efficacy, promote self-directed learning, and improve performance and retention. This qualitative, exploratory case study explores how online higher education institutions may improve the retention of non-traditional online students. Since Tinto and Cullen's model addressed the experiences of on-campus students, its applicability to the online environment is limited. The study bridges the gap between transformative research and real-world practice by contributing to a comprehensive attrition model designed specifically for online learning.

Background

Non-traditional students are over the age of twenty-four, do not live on campus, are financially independent, and may have a family (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Kamer & Ishitani, 2021; NCES, 2020; Tamir & Taylor, 2019). National statistics indicate online retention is lower than comparable on-campus programs, with some research linking low online retention to a high representation of non-traditional students, who are less likely to graduate, regardless of studying online or on-campus (Eaton & Cates, 2023; Kebritchi et al., 2023). The problem is despite the flexibility of online learning for non-traditional students, retention rates continue to decrease, resulting in the need to explore strategies and practices, address the challenges, and increase online student success in the evolving educational setting.

Researchers have relied upon Tinto's seminal work (1975, 1987, 1993) to develop strategies to improve student retention, positing that students needed to develop social and academic integration with college communities. Since the Tinto model addressed the experience of on-campus students, its applicability to the online environment is limited. Subsequent reviews of online attrition literature report diverse factors (Kemper et al., 2023) but have yet to propose a comprehensive model. This study will contribute insights from first-year non-traditional online students on how online higher education institutions may increase retention by developing support systems tailored to the needs of online students. These outcomes may present stakeholders with options for increasing retention by developing support systems tailored to the needs of online students.

Conceptual Framework

Tinto and Cullen (1973) proposed a theoretical model describing factors influencing student dropout from college. Tinto updated his model (1975, 1987, 1989, 1993, 1997, 1998), and other researchers extended his work (Berger & Braxton, 1998; Coppola, 1999; Grimes, 1997; Pascarella, 1999; Smith, 1999). Tinto and Pusser (2006) noted the difficulties institutions face in operationalizing and evaluating many topics related to academic persistence. Two major domains are influential. First, the student entry requirements and characteristics are fixed for any institution. The second and more variable is student involvement,

which may be the most important factor in persistence and success.

Tinto and Cullen's model (1973) hypothesized that student integration into the institution and its social and educational settings correlated directly to the students' later goals and institutional commitments. The positive correlation reflects that higher integration would decrease the student's likelihood of dropping out. Tinto (2006) stated there was more interaction between the institution's and student's roles. In this latest version of the theory, it is not the students who failed; the fault lies with the students and their institutions. Therefore, it is important to create a learning environment tailored to the student and to enhance academic success with a high-quality educational approach (Hayek, 2011).

Literature Review

Non-traditional students are often characterized by one or more of the following identities: (a) age 25 and older, (b) work status, (c) family responsibilities, (d) first-generation, (e) commuter, (f) financially self-sufficient, and/or (i) a military veteran. As such, these non-traditional students increasingly turn to online education as a flexible and accessible alternative to traditional classroom settings (MacDonald, 2018; Russell, 2019; Shatila, 2024). Chen and Jang (2020) highlight that non-traditional online students often have higher levels of self-regulation and motivation than traditional students, likely due to their diverse life experiences and goals. They represent a significant and growing segment of the student population in higher education. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, non-traditional students tended to take online classes or evening courses due to their busy lives and work schedules, which provides them more flexibility in earning their education (Xu & Jaggars, 2019). The pandemic disrupted higher education and accelerated the adoption of online courses (Dwivedi et al., 2021), leading to an increasing demand for online education. This momentum of high demand for online education has forced more higher education institutions to be innovative in competing in the higher education market, providing various online courses or programs to meet the demand. Coffey (2024) stated that two-thirds of higher education institutions are adding online programs. This literature review explores recent peer-reviewed articles focusing on non-traditional online students, the current state of online

higher education, their challenges, and strategies for success.

Challenges Faced By Non Traditional Online Students

In general, there are many obstacles and stumbling blocks for college students, no matter whether they are traditional or non-traditional students (Cheng, 2023). In the study, Cheng (2023) outlines four main challenges that college students face: financial burdens (college financial issues, personal financial constraints), time management, health-related issues, and lack of guidance and mentorship. As for non-traditional students, the burden sometimes can be greater due to extra family responsibilities. Balancing multiple responsibilities is a key challenge for non-traditional online students (Artino & Stephens, 2019), which can lead to time management issues and increased stress levels. Additionally, technology-related challenges, such as limited access to reliable internet connections and a lack of technical skills, can hinder the learning experience for these students (Taylor, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted non-traditional online students, with many facing increased challenges related to remote learning and isolation (Parker et al., 2020). During the post-pandemic era, many institutions increased their remote learning options for students but needed to provide more support services. This workforce lack resulted in low performance for students.

Strategies for Success: Peer Mentoring

Many research studies aim to explore strategies for student success. James (2020) emphasizes the importance of understanding student expectations, leading to increased retention. Several studies have focused on the impact of student engagement on retention. Lu (2020) highlights the importance of timely and substantive instructor feedback in facilitating learning, improving student performance, and supporting retention. Hamann et al. (2020) examine the impact of course modalities on student success and retention, finding that the mix of online and in-person course modalities can impact student retention.

Some studies focus on strategies for non-traditional online students' success. According to Lily et al. (2018), flexible course structures and schedules can help non-traditional online students manage their time more efficiently and effectively. Peer support and

community building are key factors in the success of non-traditional online students, as highlighted by Azevedo et al. (2022). Detres et al. (2020) explored why students left an online MSW program, highlighting the need for interdisciplinary approaches to address student recruitment and retention. Afzal (2020) also emphasized the importance of supporting non-traditional students in online environments, recognizing the changing demographics of the student population in higher education. Retention strategies for online students have also been a focus of research. Seery et al. (2021) conducted a systematic literature review of online retention research in higher education, identifying common retention issues and strategies related to student factors, motivation, and faculty-student interactions. Eakins et al. (2021) review the history of online education and provide a conceptual framework for incorporating online learning in an institution's student success plan for both traditional and non-traditional students. The use of online forums as a tool for promoting student retention has also been investigated. Pinchbeck et al. (2021) found that asynchronous forums can effectively promote student retention in an online distance learning environment.

The impact of the pandemic on online student retention has been a focus of recent research. Brown et al. (2022) examined how first-year retention of online students was affected during the pandemic, suggesting that financial aid could be used to address the needs of online students to improve their retention. Finally, Rotar (2022, 2024) conducted a systematic literature review of factors critical for online students' attrition, retention, or progress, focusing on the adult student population. The study identified four groups of factors influencing adult students' online learning: student factors, course factors, social factors, and support factors. Overall, the literature on online adult student retention highlights the importance of understanding student expectations, supporting non-traditional students, promoting student engagement, and implementing effective strategies to improve student retention in online courses. The impact of the pandemic on online student retention and the factors influencing adult students' online learning have also been major areas of focus in recent research.

Non-traditional online students represent a diverse and growing population in higher education. Understanding their characteristics, challenges, and strategies for success is crucial for designing effective

online learning environments that meet their needs. Future research should explore ways to support students and enhance their educational experiences in the post-pandemic era.

Research Question and Methodology

The study addresses the following question: How can higher education institutions improve retention of first-year non-traditional online students? A qualitative exploratory research design approach will be used to investigate first-year online students' perceptions of their learning experiences and the support they receive at an online university in the southwestern United States. The target population will be approximately twenty participants, with five students from three colleges within the university. The invitation letter will include information regarding inclusion or exclusion as a participant, a link to the informed consent, and a SurveyMonkey instrument with open-ended questions. Data collection will begin after earning Institutional Review Board approval.

Recommendations for Future Research

Since this study is a work in progress, results are not available at this time. The researchers are considering a longitudinal study to explore the following: Are students changing their career paths while pursuing their degrees? Are they opting for stay-at-home positions as a result of obtaining their degrees online? Additionally, how has the pandemic influenced their decision-making process regarding online education? For instance, if the pandemic had not occurred, would they have still chosen online learning, and how does this impact retention rates?

Conclusion

The attrition rate of online courses is higher than on-campus courses, creating a persistent challenge for higher education institutions. Mitigating academic barriers encountered by non-traditional online students aligns with promoting educational equity among an underserved population. The study bridges the gap between transformative research and real-

world practice by contributing to a comprehensive attrition model designed specifically for online learning.

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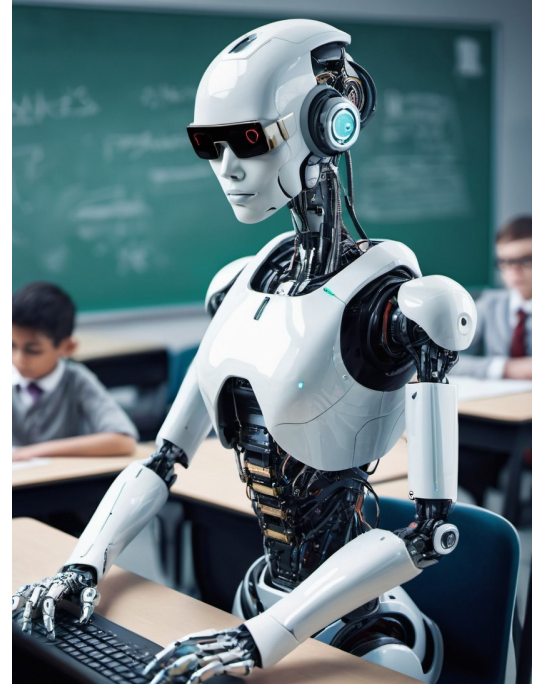
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Identifying and Activating Student AI Skills

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Abstract

The University of Phoenix (UOPX) is addressing workforce skills gaps by equipping students with career-aligned skills. Since its release, artificial intelligence (AI) has rapidly redefined job roles and skill requirements. In response, a working group defined foundational and advanced AI skills through extensive research and stakeholder collaboration. The team identified key foundational AI skills and advanced AI skills, ensuring alignment with industry needs, and placing an emphasis on the durable skills critical for long-term success. This work has led to the development of an AI Literacy Framework and credit-bearing AI courses. These efforts aim to prepare students for an AI-driven workplace and have been shared at academic conferences to inspire, support, and guide other institutions.

Introduction

Employers are increasingly recognizing a workforce ‘skills gap,’ a disparity between the current skills of employees and those that will be needed in the future (Winiarski, 2023). The World Economic Forum’s recent report predicts that six out of ten employees will require upskilling or reskilling by 2027 to stay competitive in their roles (Masterson, 2023). The University of Phoenix (UOPX) is dedicated to bridging this gap with a primary focus on equipping students with [career-aligned skills](#) that prepare them for success in the workforce. By continuously monitoring industry needs, including labor market analytics, and actively consulting with faculty and industry advisory councils, the university ensures students are well-prepared for the demands of their chosen industries. These career-aligned skills are identified, mapped,

and measured within each course, enabling students to recognize, acquire, and leverage their value as they progress toward graduation.

Since the release of generative artificial intelligence (AI), organizations across industries have embraced its use. As technology evolves, AI is rapidly redefining job roles and skill requirements. A study from Deloitte (2024) surveyed over 2,800 leaders from organizations currently piloting AI use cases, and 79% of respondents, “expect generative AI to drive substantial transformation within their organization and industry over the next three years” (p.7). To ensure all students are well-prepared for a workplace where leveraging AI is an increasingly in-demand skill set, the university recognized the need to define foundational and advanced AI skills at all levels. However, defining and agreeing upon these skills presented a challenge, as the world of AI is constantly evolving.

Defining AI Skills

A working group was formed to define foundational and advanced AI skills with broad stakeholder representation from across the university, including associate deans, curriculum managers, academic assessment, academic program life cycle, and college operations. The team was charged with three deliverables:

1. Definition of student AI skills
2. Identification of foundational AI skills
3. Identification of Advanced AI skills by program or industry

Research

The working group leveraged emerging research and synthesized industry research reports, the UOPX AI Research Database, and data and analytics from Lightcast. Over a dozen industry research reports reviewed offered a deep analysis of the top in-demand skills required to use AI effectively. These reports explored both technical proficiency and cognitive abilities and emphasized the importance of adaptability and collaboration in navigating the dynamic AI landscape, thereby promoting informed decision-making and scholarly discourse across industries. The UOPX AI Research Database is the home to over 150 curated AI resources that provide insight into AI's impact on student learning, careers, and higher education. Resources include articles,

organizations, conferences, research papers, presentations, tools, etc. (Center for Teaching and Learning, 2024). As a global leader in labor market analytics, Lightcast offers a wide range of tools and features for analyzing labor market trends. Using the Lightcast platform, the team gathered data and identified trends for in-demand AI skills (Lightcast, 2024).

Findings indicate that as AI technology continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace, employers prioritize [durable skills](#), traditionally referred to as 'soft skills,' that stand the test of time. Durable skills are highly valued by employers who seek to build cohesive, innovative, and adaptable teams because these abilities complement technical skills and enhance performance and outcomes (Edelman, 2024). A comprehensive national analysis of over 80 million job postings further confirmed that seven of the top ten most requested skills were durable skills (Cole et al., 2021). Lightcast also projects considerable growth of durable skills for AI-related job titles, represented in Figure 1, underscoring the importance of these skills in the evolving AI landscape.

Foundational Student AI Skills

Guiding Questions

1. What are the basic AI skills all students should acquire?
2. What are employers expecting students to know upon graduation?


Skills	Postings	% of Total Postings	Profiles	% of Total Profiles 	Projected Skill Growth	Skill Growth Relative to Market
Communication	2,638	39%	792	13%	+4%	Lagging
Research	2,226	33%	2,617	42%	+17%	Growing
Leadership	1,685	25%	1,371	22%	+8%	Stable
Innovation	1,344	20%	681	11%	+26%	Rapidly Growing
Problem Solving	1,074	16%	326	5%	+11%	Growing
Influencing Skills	526	8%	59	1%	+22%	Rapidly Growing
Decision Making	517	8%	178	3%	+14%	Growing

FIGURE 1 | Projected Skill Growth for AI-Related Job Titles

Note: Projected Skill Growth (Lightcast, March 12, 2024)

Foundational student AI skills refer to the basic skills students need to engage with AI technologies effectively. With over 40 skills generated from various research sources, the work-group collaborated to determine the best path forward to identify a list of foundational AI skills that could realistically be implemented, measured, and aligned with the university’s vision and strategy. The final foundational AI skill recommendation included seventeen sub-skills organized into six related AI skill groups, as shown in Table 1.

AI Skill Groups	Sub-skills
Growth Mindset	Adaptability Continuous/lifelong learning Experimentation
Critical Thinking	Critical Thinking Decision making Problem Solving Data literacy
Mindfulness	Emotional intelligence Reflection Bias detection
Character	Ethical reasoning Academic Integrity
Digital Literacy	Problem formulation AI Prompting Digital literacy
Creativity	Creativity Innovation

TABLE 1 | Recommended Foundational AI Skill Groups and Sub-skills

Note: Student AI Skill Recommendations (3b Student AI KSA, 2024)

The working group also confirmed that many of the recommended foundational AI skills are already present in 100-200-level coursework, allowing for more straightforward updates should the university choose to integrate AI content in the future. This highlights the importance of alignment between the recommended foundational AI skills, comparable skills already present in 100-200-level coursework, and a clear AI skill description.

Advanced Student AI Skills

Guiding Questions

1. For specific programs/colleges, what AI skills should students acquire?
2. What are the programs or fields of study that are being most impacted by employer desired AI skills?
3. Are there specific AI tools students should be exposed to?

Advanced AI skills build on foundational knowledge and dive deeper into AI tools and their applications within each program or industry, typically aligned with 300-level coursework and above. The identification and organization of the foundational AI skills served as a framework for UOPX subject matter experts to identify the top advanced AI skills for each program or industry. While specifics vary, many of the recommended advanced AI skills are already included in core coursework, allowing for a potentially simplified process should the decision be made to incorporate AI content into the core curriculum. Additionally, there are instances where foundational and advanced AI skills are the same, which underscores the importance of a clear differentiation within skill descriptions.

The work-group found greater value in identifying potential program or industry AI use cases than specific AI tools, as new tools are constantly being released. Table 2 notes the alignment between the recommended advanced AI skills, comparable skills already present in 300+ level coursework, AI skill descriptions, and potential industry use cases for the Bachelor of Science in Industrial-Organizational Psychology (BSIOP).

Expert Student AI Skills

There was also determined to be value in defining expert student AI Skills. Expert AI skills prepare students to be AI experts in their field. Expert skills focus on driving strategy, innovation, and creating impactful solutions across various industries.

Future Work

The definition and identification of foundational and advanced AI skills provide the basis for the next steps

Bachelor of Science in Industrial-Organizational Psychology (BSIOP)		
Skills:	Comparable skills already incorporated in UOPX courses	AI-related skill definition/detail
Ethics	Critical Thinking, Decision Making	Understanding the ethical implications of AI in organizations including potential biases, decision-making transparency, and privacy concerns.
Leadership	Organizational Leadership, Organization Development	Leaders will need to possess the ability to effectively integrate AI into business strategies, make decisions regarding AI implementation, and lead teams in leveraging AI technologies. Leaders will need to foster a culture of continuous learning to adapt to the changes brought about by AI.
Change Management	Change Management, Strategic Planning, Employee Relations	Students will need the skills to effectively manage the integration of AI tools into organizational or HR processes, and navigate the transformation brought about by AI.
Data Literacy	Correlation, Central Tendency and Probability, Statistical Significance	The ability to understand and interpret data is essential for leveraging AI in organizational or HR processes such as talent acquisition and management.
Digital Literacy	Talent Management, Performance Appraisal	Understanding essential AI skills and platforms is vital for effectively integrating AI into organizational process & practice.
Human-Centered Decision Making	Performance Management, Employee Relations, Decision making, Conflict Resolution	Ability to ensure that AI tools are designed and implemented with a focus on the needs and experiences of employees, employee behaviors, as well as the capacity to interpret and act on the outputs of AI systems and make decisions in collaboration with AI tools.
Potential Industry use cases:		
Automated resume screening: AI can analyze resumes and job applications, identifying keywords and skills relevant to the position, saving time and reducing bias.		
Skill gap analysis and personalized development plans: AI can identify individual skill gaps within the workforce and suggest personalized development plans based on their strengths and career goals. Behavior of employees.		
Employee sentiment analysis: AI can analyze internal communications and feedback to understand employee morale and identify potential areas for improvement in workplace culture and engagement. Employee Behaviors.		
Ethical considerations and bias mitigation: As AI continues to integrate into I-O Psychology, ensuring ethical development and deployment of these tools is crucial to address issues of bias, transparency, and fairness in the workplace.		
Psych research: Data Analysis and Interpretation: AI tools, such as machine learning algorithms, are employed to analyze and interpret large datasets, enabling researchers to identify patterns and generate insights in areas like social psychology, clinical psychology, and neuroscience.		

TABLE 2 | Advanced AI Skill Recommendations, Alignment, and Potential Industry Use Cases for BSIOP

Note: Student AI Skill Recommendations (3b Student AI KSA, 2024)

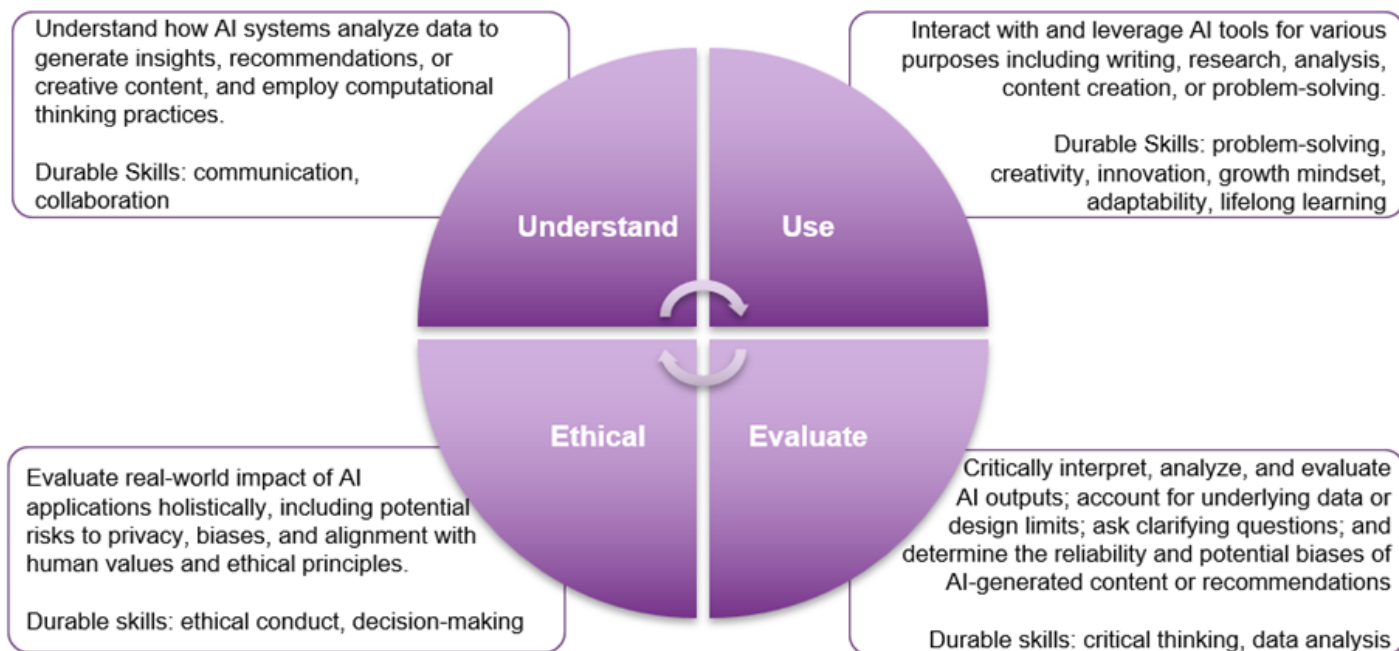


FIGURE 2 | AI Literacy Framework and Associated Durable Skills

Note: AI Literacy Framework (Phase 2 AI Group, 2024)

for the UOPX Academic Colleges, Assessment, and Center for Teaching and Learning. Discussions are ongoing as UOPX leaders strategize the best approach to ensuring students are prepared to use AI effectively as they would in their career field.

AI Literacy Work

Higher education institutions can better ensure comprehensive learning, alignment with industry needs, and overall student preparedness for the AI-driven workplace by adopting a structured approach to defining and differentiating AI skills at various levels. AI Literacy refers to the durable skills that enable students to understand, leverage, and critically evaluate AI technologies, allowing them to participate safely and ethically in an increasingly digital world. AI Literacy Framework, represented in Figure 2.

Credit Bearing AI Course(s)

UOPX is currently developing credit-bearing AI courses. ‘Artificial Intelligence in Everyday Life’ will be available for any university learner and focus on understanding generative AI technology/tools. A specific and deliberate focus will be on the importance of identifying and developing durable skills for an AI-assisted workforce. Additional AI courses that may be considered for future exploration include “Artificial Intelligence for K-12 Educators” and “Professional Use of Artificial Intelligence.”

Conference Presentations

The research findings were presented at the [2024 UPCEA Summit for Online Leadership and Administration and the Distance Teaching & Learning Conference](#) July 22-24, 2024, in Minneapolis, Minnesota, By Mary Elizabeth Smith, Director of Learning Innovation Strategy, and Jessica Sylvester, Senior Manager of College Operations, and The ‘Identifying and Activating Student Foundational and Advanced AI Skills’ presentation delves into the challenges of defining foundational and advanced AI student skills and how UOPX’s collaborative approach with diverse stakeholders led to the identification of seventeen critical skills, forming the basis for the future of AI in our curriculum. The research used, student AI skill recommendations, and the translation of this process into a framework for advanced program-level skills are shared to support other higher education institutions struggling to define and identify student AI skills, providing a model to emulate. The

presentation’s key takeaways:

1. Understand how the collaborative approach, with diverse stakeholders, ensured a comprehensive perspective from various domains within the university.
2. Appreciate the process of leveraging emerging research, focusing on critical skills for workplace success.
3. Evaluate the output of the collaborative approach and research-driven effort and determine whether they could engage in this at their institution.

This research has also been accepted for presentation at UOPX’s [2024 Knowledge Without Boundaries Research Summit](#) in October.

Conclusion

This research underscores the critical importance of integrating AI skills into higher education curriculum. Through collaboration and research-driven efforts, UOPX has successfully defined and identified foundational, advanced, and expert student AI skills, emphasizing the durable skills essential for long-term success in the workplace. These findings will inform curriculum development initiatives, ensuring students are well-prepared to leverage AI effectively within their career field. Moreover, the presentation of these findings at academic conferences signifies their potential impact beyond the university, offering insights and guidance to institutions grappling with similar challenges in defining and identifying student AI skills.

About the Author

Jessica Sylvester, Senior Manager of College Operations, drives positive change using data-driven insights, fosters collaboration, increases strategic efficiency to enhance student success and contributes to the university’s strategic initiatives. As a faculty member, she facilitates courses for the Colleges of Social and Behavioral Sciences and Education. Sylvester is a Doctor of Education candidate specializing in Higher Education Administration with a dissertation focus on the retention and progression of non-traditional women students pursuing online higher education. She earned a Bachelor of Social

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Transformative Inquiry

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Abstract

Transformative Inquiry is an approach toward understanding and fostering the full range of deep and meaningful relationships from the personal to the political and beyond. It is an integral model designed to support investigation into the essential and meaningful relationships that both transform and potentiate. Understanding the nature of human potential requires the adoption of an open perspective. Our highest aspirations demand care, consideration, and clarity of purpose. Equally important is the need for patience and understanding – from ourselves and others. Discussing Transformative inquiry reveals that the full actualization of human potential has fallen victim to the bifurcation of research methodologies. Transformative Inquiry is distinct from other approaches through its structure and content. It is a specific and unique combination of the axiological, ontological, epistemological, methodological, and rhetorical components upon which it is based.

Introduction

Understanding the nature of human potential requires the adoption of an open perspective. Our highest aspirations demand care, consideration, and clarity of purpose. Equally important is the need for patience and understanding – from ourselves and others. This emphasis on patience and understanding not only aids in pursuing our potential but also fosters a sense of empathy and consideration. It prompts us to ask why some individuals seem to effortlessly reach their highest potential while others struggle throughout their lifetime. This understanding and empathy are crucial in our exploration of human potential.

Transformative inquiry reveals that the full actualization of human potential has fallen victim to the bifurcation of research methodologies. Consider that methodological choices, qualitative and quantitative, seem bent upon discovering or determining the one theory, hypothesis, model, or concept or the one narrative, description, interpretation, or experience that will detail the truth. While it is easy to appreciate mixed-method and integral approaches of inquiry that attempt to span this divide, for a transformative inquiry, truth is a problem. The justification of this statement, the over-balancing of epistemological emphasis towards pursuing the truth of human potential, is,

in one sense, an essential purpose of transformative inquiry. Transformative Inquiry is an approach to understanding and fostering the full range of deep and meaningful relationships from the personal to the political and beyond. It is an integral model designed to support investigation into the important and meaningful relationships that both transform and potentiate.

A Dark Age of Reason

Amidst the backdrop of technological, medical, and scientific breakthroughs, is it conceivable that we are in or on the brink of a “dark age of reason”? This thought-provoking question demands our attention and reflection. Upon reflection, the answer might lean towards “yes.” This thesis suggests that for every technological wunderkind, medical mastermind, or scientific genius, there are hundreds, perhaps hundreds of thousands, of others languishing in our modern revelry. It could even be argued that the few pioneers we celebrate have themselves been contained, constrained, and controlled to the point that their powerful breakthroughs came only after surrendering the bulk of their creative potential to a demanding system or by mere chance.

Beyond the limited scope of those celebrated by science and technology, how can we address art, service, teaching, and other vocations of human necessity? In the second sense, the purpose of transformative inquiry is to address the whole of human potential, and it begs the question: Where is it permissible to play with our possibilities?

This question gives rise to the third and final sense of the purpose of transformative inquiry, which is an integral address to the nature of creativity, originality, inventiveness, imagination, inspiration, ingenuity, resourcefulness, and vision. In philosophical terms, transformative inquiry will return to and rely upon the natural flow found in and between beauty and values (axiology), goodness and reality (ontology), and truth and knowledge (epistemology). Regarding the full actualization of human potential, this shift is about uncovering a beautiful personality, a deep goodness within, and an enduring truth of self. This is the stuff of human potential.

Consider the following thoughts:

Great spirits have always found violent opposition from

mediocrities. The latter cannot understand it when a man does not thoughtlessly submit to hereditary prejudices but honestly and courageously uses his intelligence.

– Albert Einstein

If awareness of anomaly plays a role in the emergence of new sorts of phenomena, it should surprise no one that a similar but more profound awareness is prerequisite to all acceptable changes of theory. On this point historical evidence is, I think, entirely unequivocal. The state of Ptolemaic astronomy was a scandal before Copernicus' announcement.

– Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (3rd Ed.), p. 67.

In summary, the title of this essay was a question: Is everything determined? The answer is yes, it is. But it might as well not be, because we can never know what is determined.

– Stephen Hawking, *Black Holes and Baby Universes and Other Essays*, p. 139.

Statistical mechanics demonstrate that we can build theories about those properties of complex systems that are insensitive to details. But [this] is relatively simple. If, instead, core phenomena of the deepest importance do not depend on all the details, then we can hope to find beautiful and deep theories. Such order [development] is robust and emergent, a kind of collective crystallization of spontaneous structure.

– Stuart Kauffman, *At Home in the Universe*, p. 18.

Each of these scientists was holding something up for us to see and understand – this is true. But to stop here at truth (epistemology) alone would be to miss the central lesson, for they were also holding something together for us all to see, which is beautiful (axiology). They were holding something together they hoped we would find in ourselves, which is good and real (ontology). Restoring that ‘togetherness’ seeks to place the wheels of human potential on an upward and emergent track. This much is real – beauty, goodness, and truth are the elements of this ‘togetherness’.

The Methodological Wars

Modernism gave us the age of reason. “Broadly speaking, the hope was that the search for truth by means of reason and the natural sciences would replace superstition, irrationalism, and fear and

lead to an ordered world in which men thought for themselves instead of following customs or beliefs that had been held unquestioningly for generations” (Newell, 2005, p. 2). Immanuel Kant offered the following motto as defining Enlightenment, “*have the courage to use your own understanding.*” Goya portrayed this as “El sueño de la razón produce monstruos,” or “the sleep of reason produces monsters” (Newell, 2005, p. 2).

The monsters modernism destroyed were plentiful. Many of us would not be here today – perhaps none of us – if not for the *Age of Enlightenment*. While the monsters that were destroyed needed destroying, so too were destroyed or attacked all facets of knowing that were not rationally or logically derived. Logic and rationality took on a mechanical and mathematical determination. Modernism became a monster in and of itself by slowly and completely eroding the distinction between epistemology and ontology – between truth and goodness. Therefore, modernism slowly became a problem for actualizing human potential.

Over time, this mechanical determinism began to define reality. Challenging a prevailing truth was arduous. Perhaps an act as courageous as the ones it initially sought to supplant by modernism’s formation. Then, they challenged superstition, irrationality, and religious dogma. It is curious to consider how Copernicus, Galileo, or Newton would fare today. Would their discoveries have ever been known if they had been forced to chain their discoveries to the irrationality of the Dark Age? They had to overcome a flawed and dangerous system to actualize their potential. Philosophically, they had to prevail over the same problem we face today in fully actualizing human potential – the singularity of a truth.

Unfortunately, and fortunately for human potential, the world (nature) just wasn’t cut that way in its totality. Some things just defied reason and logic. However, the strength of empiricism and mechanical determinism has not lessened, although it has been compromised by its opposite (intellectualism) modifying its positions. We still can see and feel the power of this empirical paradigm in the physical and biological sciences and engineering, psychology, sociology, and education. Yet, its power has not shaken its critics or its complement within naturalistic inquiry.

I think the question of a normative biology

cannot be escaped or avoided, even if this calls into question the whole history and philosophy of science in the West. I am convinced that the value-free, value-neutral, value-avoiding model of science that we inherited from physics, chemistry, and astronomy, where it is necessary and desirable to keep the church out of scientific affairs, is quite unsuitable for the scientific study of life. It is absolutely impossible to say that a man becomes a good physician by pure chance and it is time we stopped taking any such notion seriously (Maslow, 1971, p. 5).

Postmodernism intended to communicate across the divide created by epistemologies of determination. To lessen, as it were, the *value-free, value-neutral, value-avoiding model of science*, the naturalists brought with them the notion of multiple realities. Two things, or more, can be true at once. The irony was the construction of unintended barriers when the naturalist stole technique and justification from its modernist counterpart to defeat deterministic thinking. Considering critical theorists, it is rather amazing the rapidity by which axiological and ontological intentions were consumed and deconstructed by a new and more vicious epistemology. Deconstruction started as a pursuit of a holistic understanding of the human condition and became a ‘pull-it-apart’ epitaph that was not much different from its predecessor in terms of its ability to understand and encourage the full actualization of human potential.

A Paradigm Shift

Let’s divide a paper in half along the long diagonal so that we may place these methodological bifurcations on either side. I contend we would have something that looks like the diagram below.

The key to this diagram is that it is completely epistemological. There is no purpose beyond the search for truth. So, we, in essence, have represented a disagreement in approaches to the truth where, on both sides, there is a recognition that absolute truth is unlikely to exist.

What if we shifted our thinking paradigmatically? Consider the following analogy. The earth has an equatorial radius of 3963.34 miles. The thickness of the biosphere, the area known to support life, is difficult to measure. Some fish species can be found

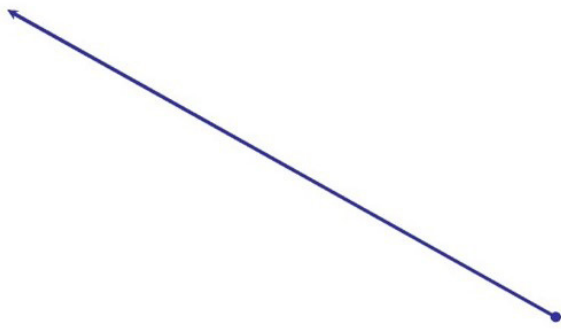


FIGURE 1 | Diagonal fold diagram

as far down as 27,467 feet below sea level in the Puerto Rican Trench, and Ruppell's Vulture has been found at altitudes of 37,073 feet above sea level. So, given a rough measurement, the biosphere is about 12 miles in depth. Using the equatorial radius as a benchmark, the biosphere is about 3 tenths of one percent of that radius. But these are miracle miles, for all life is found within them. In relation to the earth's radius, the biosphere is no more than a thin line, like the one separating approaches to the truth. It is this separating line we need to open, engage, and understand, and in doing so, we may find that it is not thin but the container of a deep human ecology. That is transformative – this is the nature of transformative inquiry.

The difference between modernism and postmodernism revolves around the truth—around epistemology. Modernism enlightened by challenging superstitions, irrationality, and fear with reason, logic, and experimentation. This was good and valuable for actualizing human potential. Postmodernism enlightened by challenging the assumptions of a “value-free philosophy of science unsuitable for human questions” (Maslow, 1971, p. 5.). This was good and of value to actualizing human potential. However, empiricism and intellectualism fell victim to the same limiting process – the truth. Modernism by way of reductionism, where truth (epistemology) holds captive new thought and creativity by way of chaining it to an old or obsolete or a lesser thought, and postmodernism by way of deconstructionism, where truth pulls apart a new thought and creativity by way of an insidious intellectual questioning.

On one side is the anvil, where truth is never held certain but merely a product of statistical probability,

and on the other, the hammer, where truth is never held certain but merely a product of naturalistic observation, narrative, and debate. How odd that we stand divided by agreement – that truth cannot be held certain by more than a minute or less than the present.

While postmodernism, like modernism, promoted an initial explosion of growth in knowledge concerning the human condition, it failed to become the propagator of methodologies that concerned themselves with fully actualizing human potential. The problem is obvious, and the solution is simple. We need to reposition ourselves and our inquiry methods to optimize human potential growth and appreciate a holistic and balanced integral approach where axiology, ontology, and epistemology move reciprocally and in relationship toward the full actualization of human potential.

Transformative Inquiry at Work in the World

The critical methodological implication of transformative inquiry is practical. The purpose of transformative approaches is to locate sensible and usable solutions to immediate and local problems while simultaneously lifting the human potential toward their greatness possibilities. The methodological implication of transformative inquiry crystallizes as an ontological salute to the pragmatic intention of remaining constantly focused on realizing human potential. This intention is ontologically centered and significantly distant from epistemological intentions. Finally, the transformative inquirer does not work around the truth of the problem but instead attacks the very nature of the problem by seeking a direct intervention or solution that will directly influence the actualization of human potential.

While there can be no empirical demonstrations of the universality of innate potential excellences, it is an *a priori* certainty there where such universality is established ... the manifestation of personal excellences in the world will be dramatically increased (Norton, 1976, p. xii).

About the Author

Dr. Mark McCaslin is an academic leader with a rich history of teaching and administration. In addition to his role at CLSOR, he serves as a University Research

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The Biggest Threat to Leadership in the New World of Work: The Way Leaders Think and Act

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Abstract

Leadership decision-making is one of the core tenets of organizational leadership. In a fast-changing and complex organizational landscape, the quality of decision-making must be rigorous and based on sound and well-established principles, including how epistemology shapes decision-making. The rise of postmodernism in broader society and in organizational studies may offer new ways of understanding organizational dynamics. However, postmodern epistemology, combined with the rise in fake news, misinformation and manufactured consent narratives, will seriously challenge effective leadership decision-making by questioning fundamental assumptions about truth, rationality, and progress. Organizational leaders should be fully aware of these changes in broader society and education and should not underestimate the dangers associated with a postmodernist paradigm.

Most leaders acknowledge that the business environment is rapidly changing, primarily brought about by the pervasiveness of technology and unlimited access to information. In addition, the world is also experiencing geo-political instability, intra-country conflicts, social unrest, climate change, and the rise of populism. As such the demands of modern-day business are increasingly becoming unpredictable and require leadership that can successfully lead in what is referred to as a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) environment. The challenges in the new world of work necessitate leaders to be better prepared to deal with unforeseen and unplanned events. EY (2021) suggested that the quality and habits of thought are primary elements to lead effectively in uncertain and volatile times. However, rational thinking and our understanding of knowledge acquisition are continuously being

challenged and clouded by postmodernist relativism. Relativism is one of the biggest threats to the quality of leadership decision-making and the development of trustworthy and effective leaders. In addition, decision-making is also challenged by fake news and misinformation which obscure and attempt to skew reality. Subsequently, this article will address the importance of changes in the external environment from emerging trends in epistemology and the dangers of a postmodernist influence on leadership as a social construct.

Post-Covid challenged some misconceptions about leadership, such as avoiding making important decisions based on false narratives or unconscious biases. Leadership actions and organizational outcomes are driven by their decision-making. How leaders think and act must receive therefore much

more inquiry in a volatile environment. Organizations need to continuously adapt to the context in which they are operating. One of the key responsibilities of a leader is to monitor the external and internal environments and formulate a strategy based on the strengths and weaknesses of the organizations and the opportunities presented by the environment (Antonakis & Day, 2018). Organizational research focuses mainly on uncertainty about the impact of the external environment in terms of technological, consumer, resources, and competitor behavior (Beugre et al. 2006). However, there is little research from an epistemological meta-perspective about the dangers, such as postmodernist decision-making, of the idea of leadership as a social construct.

Dietz et al. (2003) argued organizational behavior research mostly draws an artificial boundary between organizations and the environment and subsequently fails to consider that organizational behavior is in part a product of the forces outside of an organization. Hancock and Tyler (2001) concluded that “postmodern organization theory is well and truly with us” (p.90). Organizational leadership is not immune to external societal and educational trends. Organizational and leadership studies must therefore strongly consider the impact of a postmodernist influence. In addition, McKinley (2003) argues that scholarly contributions in organization studies already bear the stamp of postmodernist epistemology. Such a paradigm might not be mainstream yet, but a general postmodernist epistemological paradigm is already evident in organizational studies. Kilduff and Mehra (1997) strongly argue for a postmodernist epistemology “in pursuit of radical challenges to accepted knowledge to provoke an ongoing conversation concerning the potential of postmodernism for revolutionizing organizational research.” (p. 453). In addition, authors like Calás and Smircich (1988, 1999) have been leading the discourse on developing arguments and contributions of a postmodernist critical management movement and research.

Chia (1995) argues that what distinguishes the postmodern from the modern is a ‘style of thinking’ which eschews the uncritical use of common organizational terms such as ‘organizations’, ‘individuals’, ‘environment’, ‘structure’, and ‘culture’, etc. Duignan (2024) lists eight tenets of postmodernism. Among these are the denial of objective truth, the rejection of reason, and that science and technology (even logic and reason) are not

vehicles of progress, but instruments used to oppress.

Hatch (2018) provides multiple perspectives on the development of organizational studies, comparing modern and postmodern approaches. Reality from a modern perspective is defined by convergence, while postmodern approaches are incoherence and fragmented. Similarly, knowledge from a modern perspective is universal while postmodernism view knowledge as provisional. While it is not clear how systemic this transformation from a modern to a postmodernist has become, critics such as Donaldson (2003) stated that even though postmodernism presently enjoys some following in organizational studies, it should not utilize the postmodernist approach.

Brocato et al. (2010) propose a postmodern evaluation matrix to address conceptual ambiguities in leadership research, emphasizing complex behavioral decision-making processes over individual traits. These authors argue that a postmodern approach also helps researchers identify a group’s performance on a continuum that would demonstrate their willingness to act in a way that tests individual limits, stretches group boundaries, and exceeds company goals. Similarly, Peltonen (2016) emphasized that the postmodern approach questions the core assumptions of organizational science, regarding the neutrality of information, and the rationality of the business world.

Collectively, these authors suggest a shift from traditional leadership paradigms towards more complex, context-dependent approaches that acknowledge the challenges of postmodern organizational environments that are opposing the rationality of decision-making. A shift towards a postmodern view where objective truth is seen as relative can therefore complicate decision-making and the establishment of shared goals or values within an organization. In addition, such a rejection of objective reality will complicate efforts to measure performance or set concrete organizational goals.

Most leaders, including broader society, rely on the mainstream and social media for their information needs. Chomsky and Herman (2002) researched the role of the mass media and established a conceptual communications propaganda model in which they identified five filters. Chomsky and Herman (2002) argued that information is filtered through a series of unspoken biases and assumptions that favor certain viewpoints. They referred to this filtered

information as “manufactured consent” and argued the media restricting access to diverse viewpoints, the public is deprived of the information they need to make informed choices. Such actions result in citizens becoming passive consumers of information, unable to critically evaluate media content and hold power structures accountable. They also identified a fifth filter which is now referred to as “Ideology as a Control Mechanism.” Chomsky and Herman (2002) concluded these attempts at “manufacturing consent” present a real danger to society.

The progressive development of postmodernist epistemology in the last 20 years, intertwined with the principle of manufacturing consent and the biased nature of the mass media present serious dangers in influencing leadership in making reliable decisions. These attempts at a convergence of postmodernist epistemology to become the dominant way in which the mass media and other forces shape our thinking should be seen for what it is – obtaining control of the way we think and act. Once such an ideology becomes dominant it becomes a ‘control mechanism’ and will define boundaries and only allow acceptable ideas. Leadership may fall into a postmodernist trap, influenced by epistemological postmodernism, media bias, and fake news, to make decisions not based on reality and sound decision-making principles. This in turn may result in a culture of mediocrity because if all viewpoints are equally valid, there’s no reason to strive for a better understanding or a more objective truth. The question could then rightly be asked: Why seek knowledge or challenge ideas if there’s no “correct” answer? What is the function of evidence-based management if decisions are not based on facts and evidence?

In conclusion: In times of turmoil and uncertainty, leadership is critical in providing clarity and direction. Although leaders might need to adapt to more fluid and less centralized forms of organization and decision-making, postmodernist approaches that relativize objective truth will add more obscurity and uncertainty. Leaders will do well when aware of the dangers and misconceptions brought about by postmodernist epistemology and trends.

About the Author

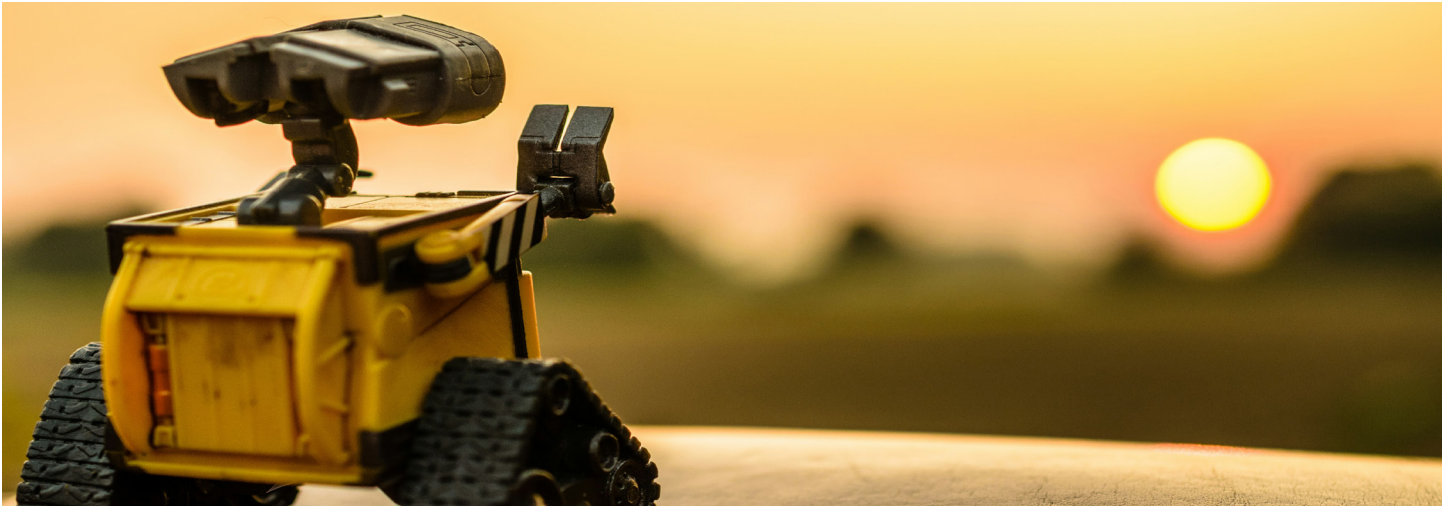
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Bringing Artificial Intelligence into the Doctoral Courses: Insights from a Pilot Study with Google Gemini

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Crafting strong research proposals is crucial for doctoral dissertation studies. New researchers and postgraduate students often struggle with the complexity of this task and may need assistance. Students typically work closely with their instructors in a collaborative process, which can be time-consuming and sometimes lead to frustration, causing delays in their research.

At the University of Phoenix College of Doctoral Studies, students begin their dissertation writing

with a study prospectus in the course DOC/714S. In this course, they establish the early structure and alignment of their intended study, including a problem statement, purpose statement, research questions, and study methodology and design. Recently, a team of researchers at the Center for Educational and Instructional Technology Research (CEITR) conducted a pilot study to assess the impact of incorporating Google's Gemini, a 3rd generation large language model (LLM), into the prospectus co-creation process.

Although the study is ongoing, the initial findings are positive.

Using Gemini in the Course

The pilot was initiated in June 2024 with two sessions of DOC/714S. Google’s free version of [Gemini](#) was chosen for its interactivity, current content, and self-checking abilities. A modified syllabus was created for the pilot with additional student activities to introduce Gemini and provide basic instruction on the use of an LLM in academic research. Practice assignments were created, and tips, tricks, and cautions were integrated into the early weeks of the class. While the pilot instructor is a member of the research team, materials were also created to help additional instructors respond to student questions and manage the modified class. In week one of the pilot classes, students were invited to participate and offered minor point incentives for their participation. Sixteen students chose to participate in the study.

Each week throughout the class, beginning in Week 2, the standard DOC/714S syllabus was supplemented with Gemini specific content. In Week 2, students were asked to install Gemini and review use guidelines and suggestions. In Week 3, students were introduced to effective prompting of the LLM and given a practice prompt generation exercise. In Week 4, students were asked to evaluate the output from Gemini from Week 3 using a rubric that assessed the output based on the impact the exercise had on their creativity, productivity, motivation, and the quality of the output. In Week 5, students were asked to perform a limited literature review on a subject of their choice using Gemini as an interactive resource. In Week 6, students moved on to co-creating their proposal problem statements and purpose statements with Gemini’s help and interactive feedback. In Week 7, students built on their prior work to co-create with Gemini an appropriate set of aligned research questions. In the final week of the course, Week 8, students were surveyed on their experiences and the impact Gemini had, positive and negative, on their proposal development.

Strategies for Using Gemini in the Courses

It’s critical to incorporate strategies to effectively incorporate Gemini into the courses. The following

are the list of critical strategies used to optimize effectiveness of using Gemini to improve students’ learning.

- Gemini is added to the curriculum consistent with the weekly course tasks/objectives
- Students are instructed to use Gemini as they develop the specific elements of the draft dissertation proposal
- They learn to “prompt” Gemini and to “interpret” the results while maintaining academic “skepticism”
- Students are given rubrics to evaluate Gemini’s output
- Weekly reflections
- Faculty feedback and guidance are critical
- Faculty training is important

Along with the weekly assignments, students were asked to reflect on their interactions with Gemini as they created their study proposals. They were asked to share insights, problems, barriers, confusions, and ideas to make the processes more effective for future students. An extract from the modified DOC/714S syllabus covering weeks 4 through 6 is shown below in Table 1.

Weekly Course Objectives	Weekly Course tasks with Gemini Integration	Weekly Course assignments with Gemini integration
Week 4 Critical and Creative Thinking: Synthesis and Scholarly Writing	Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates; Study the reading materials The Gemini Integration Pros and Cons of the G-LLM for doctoral research. Evaluating and validating the results.	Summative Assessment: Research Method and Design Using AES The Gemini Integration Use the evaluation rubric to evaluate the Gemini output from Week 3. Submit the results as an attachment to the assignment link
Week 5 Cognitive Empathy and Research Plan Submission	Becoming a Critical Thinker; Study the reading materials The Gemini Integration Conducting a G-LLM assisted literature review.	Submitting Your Research Plan From RES/709 The Gemini Integration Review the tips for conducting a literature review. Perform a brief literature review on a subject of your own choice. Submit the results as an attachment to the assignment link
Week 6 Prospectus: Problem and Purpose Statements	Prospectus Development; Study the reading materials The Gemini Integration Formulating a robust problem statement and purpose in support of the study.	Prospectus: Problem and Purpose Statements The Gemini Integration Review the guidance on how to use Gemini to generate and refine your problem and purpose statements. Submit the results as an attachment to the assignment link

TABLE 1 | Sample Syllabus for the course.

A typical student interaction with Gemini might begin like this (edited for brevity):

Figure 1. The screenshot of a conversation between a student and Gemini

Figure 2. The screenshot of a conversation between a student and Gemini

The conversation would likely continue and explore specific problems, places to search for more information, ideas about methodology and design, and more. Gemini generally prompts users with follow-up questions and suggestions. The students are thus motivated through Gemini's encouragement to pursue

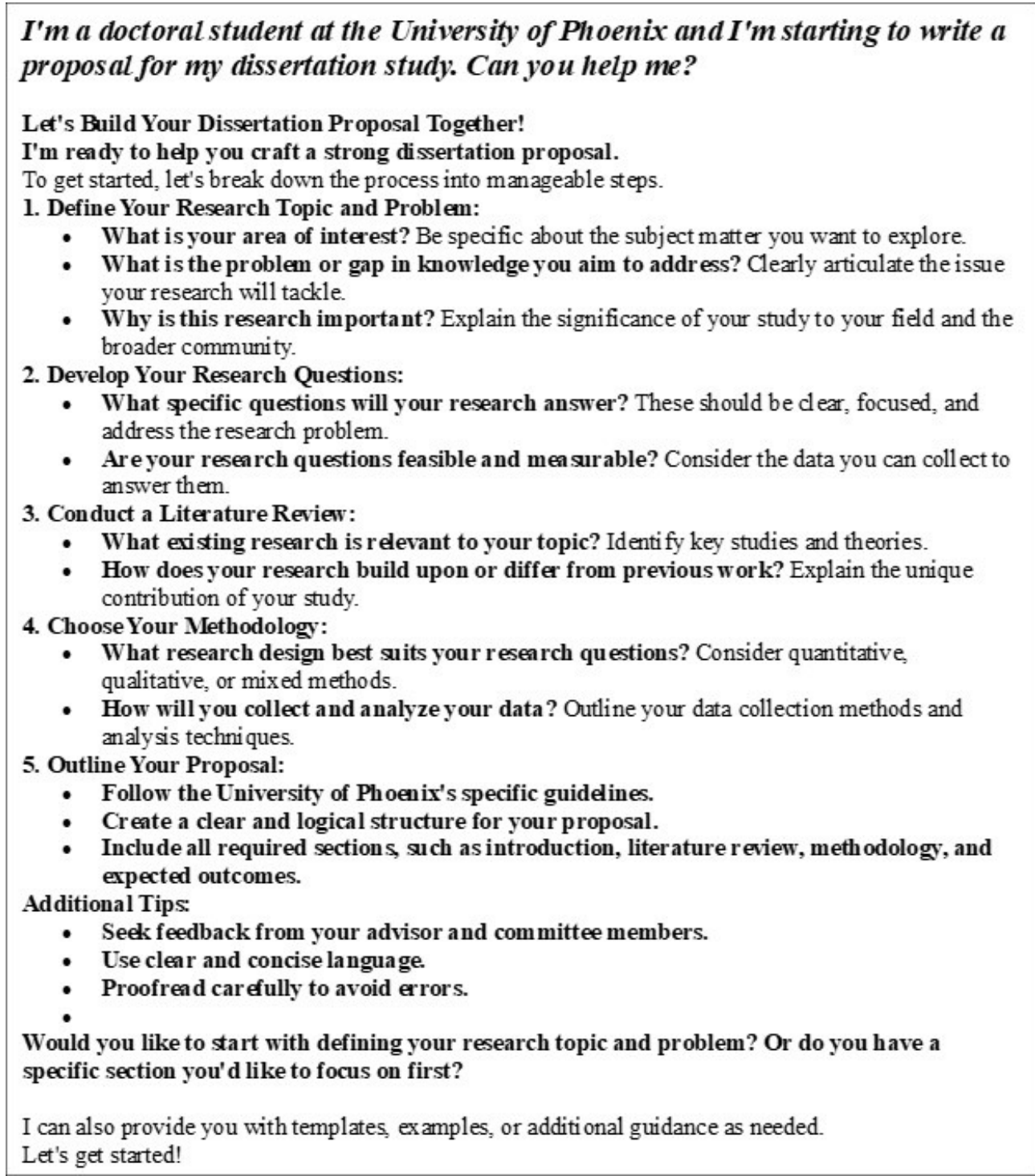


FIGURE 1 | The screenshot of a conversation between a student and Gemini.

I don't know what I want to study, but I'm interested in how executives can improve their problem-solving abilities. Any ideas for a study?

Let's Narrow Down Your Research Focus

That's a great starting point! The intersection of executive leadership and problem-solving is a rich area for research.

To help you narrow down your focus, let's consider some potential research directions:

Potential Research Topics:

1. **The Impact of Specific Problem-Solving Frameworks:**
 - How do frameworks like Design Thinking, Six Sigma, or Root Cause Analysis influence executive decision-making and problem-solving?
 - Which frameworks are most effective in different organizational contexts (e.g., size, industry)?
2. **The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Executive Problem-Solving:**
 - How does emotional intelligence impact an executive's ability to identify, analyze, and solve problems?
 - Can emotional intelligence training enhance problem-solving skills?
3. **Executive Development Programs and Problem-Solving:**
 - What types of training programs are most effective in developing executive problem-solving skills?
 - How can organizations measure the impact of these programs on organizational performance?
4. **Problem-Solving in Complex and Ambiguous Environments:**
 - How do executives approach problem-solving in situations with high levels of uncertainty and complexity?
 - What strategies can be developed to enhance problem-solving in these environments?
5. **Cross-Cultural Differences in Executive Problem-Solving:**
 - How do cultural factors influence executive problem-solving styles and approaches?
 - What challenges and opportunities arise from cross-cultural problem-solving collaborations?
 -

Additional Considerations:

- **Your Interests:** What aspects of leadership or problem-solving pique your curiosity?
- **Data Availability:** Consider the feasibility of collecting data for your chosen topic.
- **Theoretical Framework:** What theories or models can guide your research?
-

Would you like to explore one of these areas further, or do you have another idea in mind? We can also discuss potential research methodologies and data collection techniques once we have a clearer focus.

Remember, the key to a successful dissertation is finding a topic that truly interests you and aligns with your career goals.

FIGURE 2 | The screenshot of a conversation between a student and Gemini

the interactions until they are satisfied with the output.

Findings to Date

The research team continues to synthesize the findings and is updating portions of the Gemini

classroom integration. Updates include refinement of the exercises and clarification of the assignment directions based on early pilot student feedback. Clarity of the prompting was found to be instrumental in the determination of the creativity and quality of the co-created content.

Student reaction has been generally positive as

evidenced by the following feedback statements:

Student D: “Gemini’s ability to provide exhaustive, germane, and precise information on intricate subjects enables more thorough data analysis and evaluation.”

Student R: “The detailed responses and structured guidance provided by Gemini have helped me to identify key aspects of my research topic on employee retention, focusing on the impact of remote work.”

Student J: “Gemini can be a valuable resource throughout the research and writing process.”

But not all the reactions were positive:

Student Y: “I’m unsure if I did something wrong, I tried asking in different ways, but it redirected me to find the articles on my own. I will continue to try Gemini because I know it will fill gaps in my thinking and make suggestions that can help me think more creatively.”

Other initial researcher observations and findings are starting to be formulated. There is a consistent assessment that quality, productivity, and creativity are all apparently correlated with the degree of student proficiency in prompting Gemini and in evaluating the results. Students seem to master the basics quickly but need more time to achieve greater degrees of mastery. Effective prompting seems to require patience and iteration. Additionally, given the “human”-like interface, and the academic context, some students appear at risk of accepting Gemini responses as factual and complete, when more critical thinking might be more beneficial.

Summary and Conclusions

Initial findings and feedback suggest that Gemini (and other advanced LLMs) have a role to play in the classroom. They bring significant power and capability in an accessible and positive format. As with most new technology, though, there are risks and cautions that must be considered. The power of the tools in the hands of a less proficient user may lead to misunderstandings and confusion. Training students in the use of Gemini, with all due caution and respect, is important to the maintenance of desired academic rigor. Gemini cannot and should not replace or diminish the role of the instructor. Gemini can, though, augment the efforts of the instructor in a ‘three-way’

co-creation process. Gemini excels at patience, instant feedback, and creative ideas. It draws on a wealth of resources but is apparently better at synthesis of content than direct reference to documented sources. Further research may find that different LLMs have different strengths and weaknesses and that each might have a different role to play in the classroom. Given the broad use of AI and LLMs in industry, helping our students gain LLM familiarity and mastery in the classroom is both an opportunity and an obligation.

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Dr. Kebritchi is the founder and chair of the Center for Educational and Instructional Technology Research, College of Doctoral Studies, University of Phoenix. She is a passionate educational research leader with a wealth of experience working as a research methodologist and instructional designer. She has been mentoring doctoral students and supporting faculty members conducting and publishing studies in the field of education. She is interested in studying innovative ways to improve the quality of teaching and learning in K-12, higher education, and corporate settings in online and face-to-face formats. Some of her recent publications address topics such as using Artificial Intelligence tools in higher education, doctoral student success, faculty motivation in online higher education, promoting student grittiness, and critical thinking, using computer games in education, and issues and challenges related to teaching successful online courses. Dr. Kebritchi’s research works have been cited and referenced in more than 5000 research studies in over 103 countries.

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Transforming Online Learning Environments Through Evidence-Based Practices: From Insight to Action

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Abstract

Transformative learning is a profound shift in how we think, feel, and act. It is challenging our beliefs, growing as individuals, and applying new knowledge in real-life situations. By encouraging critical reflection and personal growth, transformative learning empowers individuals to become active and engaged participants in their communities and careers. This study challenges the prevailing paradigm of online education by exploring how some key learning contexts and social connections influence student outcomes at the University of Phoenix. Utilizing self-determination theory as the framework, the researchers investigated the impact of self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation on students' academic achievement and academic resilience. The basic premise of the theory involves motivation and how individuals interact with their environments. The results may indicate the potential for collaboration with educational practitioners and policymakers and inform design of online environments that foster student empowerment, social connection, and improved academic outcomes. Broader implications may influence how online learning environments are structured to support student success. By explicitly connecting the research to issues of social justice and equity in online education, it underscores the importance of creating inclusive and supportive learning environments for all students. Overall, by focusing on the factors that cultivate student motivation (competence, autonomy, relatedness) this research contributes to a more equitable and inclusive online learning environment and establishes a foundation for transformative online education that prioritizes student agency and inclusivity.

Keywords: quantitative research, self-directed learning, collaborative learning, student isolation, academic achievement, academic resilience, self-determination theory, transformative research and practice

Introduction and Background

How can we unlock student potential for thriving, not just surviving, in the dynamic landscape of online higher education? This critical question lies at the heart of transformative research and practice in online learning environments. Research shows that online courses have drawbacks, such as higher dropout and

lower completion rates than traditional in-person classes (Charokar & Dulloo, 2022). To succeed in online courses, students must be strong independent learners and develop self-directed learning skills (Sun et al., 2023). These skills involve taking ownership of their learning process, setting goals, and independently managing their time and resources. Charokar and Dulloo found a positive correlation

between self-directed learning, academic self-efficacy, and achievement motivation in undergraduate students. The results suggest that fostering students' independence and study skills can improve their self-belief and learning motivation.

The findings of an investigation of student perceptions of online collaborative learning activities in a Management Information System course suggest that well-structured activities with strong peer interaction led to increased perceived learning and satisfaction with the course (Blau et al., 2020). Heilporn et al. (2021) examined strategies for fostering communication and interaction in online learning environments and proposed a framework to aid instructors and instructional designers in creating well-structured, interactive online courses for higher education, promoting collaboration among educators, and improving student learning outcomes.

Online learning challenges require strong resilience in students as universities work to equip them with coping skills unique to the stressors of the online learning format (Nuryana et al., 2023). Avci (2022) investigated individual characteristics contributing to academic resilience, focusing on disadvantaged students who achieve high academic achievement despite challenges.

A foundational understanding of pivotal learning contexts, such as self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and the impact of social connectedness (or the absence thereof in the case of student isolation), is indispensable for the development of efficacious online learning strategies. By systematically addressing these factors, it is possible to establish a supportive and stimulating online learning environment that fosters student growth and well-being.

Transformative Learning

Traditional educational research has often been criticized for its limited ability to translate theoretical findings into practical classroom applications, leading to a persistent disconnect between research and practice (Korhonen et al., 2024). Transformative learning, a concept rooted in adult education, suggests that meaningful educational experiences can induce a profound shift in individuals' underlying beliefs, emotions, and behaviors (Waters, 2023, p. 23). While the concept of transformative learning has evolved

over time, a fundamental shift in understanding prompts individuals to explore new perspectives and adopt a changed worldview (Mezirow, 1978).

Boser and McDaniels (2018) highlight a persistent gap between academic theory and practical application across disciplines. While scholarly inquiries offer valuable insights, they frequently fail to catalyze transformative changes in the everyday practices of practitioners. Transformative learning seeks to bridge this divide within the educational context by identifying barriers to research utilization and facilitating the implementation of practical solutions. One effective strategy for bridging the gap between theory and practice, as suggested by Boser and McDaniels (2018), is fostering collaborative partnerships between researchers and educators.

Theoretical Framework - Self-Determination Theory

Motivation is a complex psychological construct that drives human behavior and decision-making. It plays a crucial role in shaping our actions, goals, and overall life trajectory. Understanding the various types of motivation can provide valuable insights into why we behave the way we do and how we can harness these motivational forces to achieve our objectives more effectively.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), a foundational and wide-ranging framework for understanding human motivation developed in the late 1980s (Deci & Ryan, 1985), offers a unique perspective on the factors that drive our actions and shape our lifestyle choices. Unlike traditional approaches that primarily focus on quantitative measures of motivation, SDT emphasizes qualitative distinctions, shifting the inquiry from "how can we increase or decrease someone's motivation?" to "how can we cultivate intrinsic motivation within individuals?" (Deci & Ryan, 1991, p. 237-288). The aim of the study is to contribute to the improvement of online learning at the University of Phoenix by investigating key factors that foster intrinsic motivation and thus improve student learning outcomes. We seek to investigate the influence of self-directed learning (SDL), collaborative learning (COL), and student isolation (ISO) on academic achievement (AA) and academic resilience (AR) within the framework of self-determination theory (SDT). Our goal is to provide insights that can inform the

development of more effective and engaging online courses, fostering student success and satisfaction in online learning environments.

Types of Motivation

Self-determination theory distinguishes between two primary types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000):

- *Autonomous motivation (intrinsic motivation)*: This encompasses actions driven by willingness, volition, and intrinsic value. It represents motivation that comes from within the individual. Intrinsic motivation represents the pleasure or rewards gained from motivational behavior. The activity is done purely for the curiosity, enjoyment and satisfaction it brings, without any external reward. Presented below are several illustrative examples of intrinsic motivation:
 - ◇ Example: An artist engages in painting during their leisure time, driven solely by personal enjoyment and creative expression, without the intention of commercializing their artwork.
 - * Motivational driver: The motivation comes from the pleasure of creating and expressing oneself, not from potential financial gain.
 - ◇ Example: A child playing with building blocks for hours, creating various structures.
 - * Motivational driver: The activity is done purely for the curiosity, enjoyment and satisfaction it brings, without any external reward.
 - ◇ Example: A scientist conducting research in their field of interest.
 - * Motivational driver: While the scientist may genuinely enjoy the process of discovery (intrinsic), there could also be extrinsic factors at play, such as the desire for recognition in their field or the need to secure future fundings.
- *Controlled motivation (extrinsic motivation)*: This stems from external pressures or activity done as a requirement. It represents motivation that is imposed from outside the individual. The

extra effort is driven by external incentives rather than inherent satisfaction. The motivation is to primarily fulfill a requirement or avoid negative consequences, rather than out of genuine interest or enjoyment. This type of motivation creates tension between external pressure and intrinsic motivation. Presented below are several illustrative examples of extrinsic motivation:

- ◇ Example: A student studying hard to get good grades and earn a scholarship.
 - * Motivational driver: The motivation comes from an external reward (the scholarship) rather than enjoyment of learning itself.
- ◇ Example: An employee working overtime to receive a bonus or promotion.
 - * Motivational driver: The extra effort is driven by external incentives rather than inherent satisfaction in the work.
- ◇ Example: Taking a math class because it is a requirement.
 - * Motivational driver: The student is taking the math class primarily to fulfill a requirement or avoid negative consequences, rather than out of genuine interest or enjoyment. This situation also highlights the common tension between external pressure and intrinsic motivation. While the student may not enjoy math, they understand that it is necessary for their academic progress or future goal.
- ◇ Example: A person volunteering at a local charity.
 - ◇ Motivational driver: While this may seem intrinsic (helping others), the motivation could be extrinsic if the person is doing it primarily to boost their resume or gain social recognition.

The SDT framework asserts that autonomous (intrinsic) motivation leads to superior performance, wellness, and engagement compared to controlled (extrinsic) motivation (Vansteenkiste et al., 2020). By focusing on cultivating autonomous motivation, SDT aims to enhance not just the quantity but the quality of motivation.

Internalizing Extrinsic Motivation

Self-determination theory (SDT) also refines the concept of extrinsic motivation, suggesting that it can be internalized to become autonomous. This process occurs when individuals understand, identify with, and integrate the value of externally motivated activities into their sense of self. This internalization of extrinsic motivation can lead to outcomes comparable to those of intrinsic motivation, characterized by interest and enjoyment in the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Basic Psychological Needs

Central to Self-Determination Theory (SDT) is the concept of three universal basic psychological needs:

Autonomy: The need to feel there is a sense of choice in one's actions.

Competence: The need to feel effective in one's actions and interactions with the environment.

Relatedness: The need to feel connected and belonging to others and one's social context.

The satisfaction of these needs is essential for optimal human functioning and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 1991; Ryan, 2023). When these needs are met, individuals are more likely to experience autonomous motivation and its associated benefits. By fostering these basic psychological needs, online learning environments can be transformed from passive content consumption to active and autonomous learning. Figure 1 illustrates the overlapping relationships among these needs, highlighting the optimal conditions for fostering intrinsic motivation and effective real-world application of knowledge.

The intersection of all three needs represents the ideal

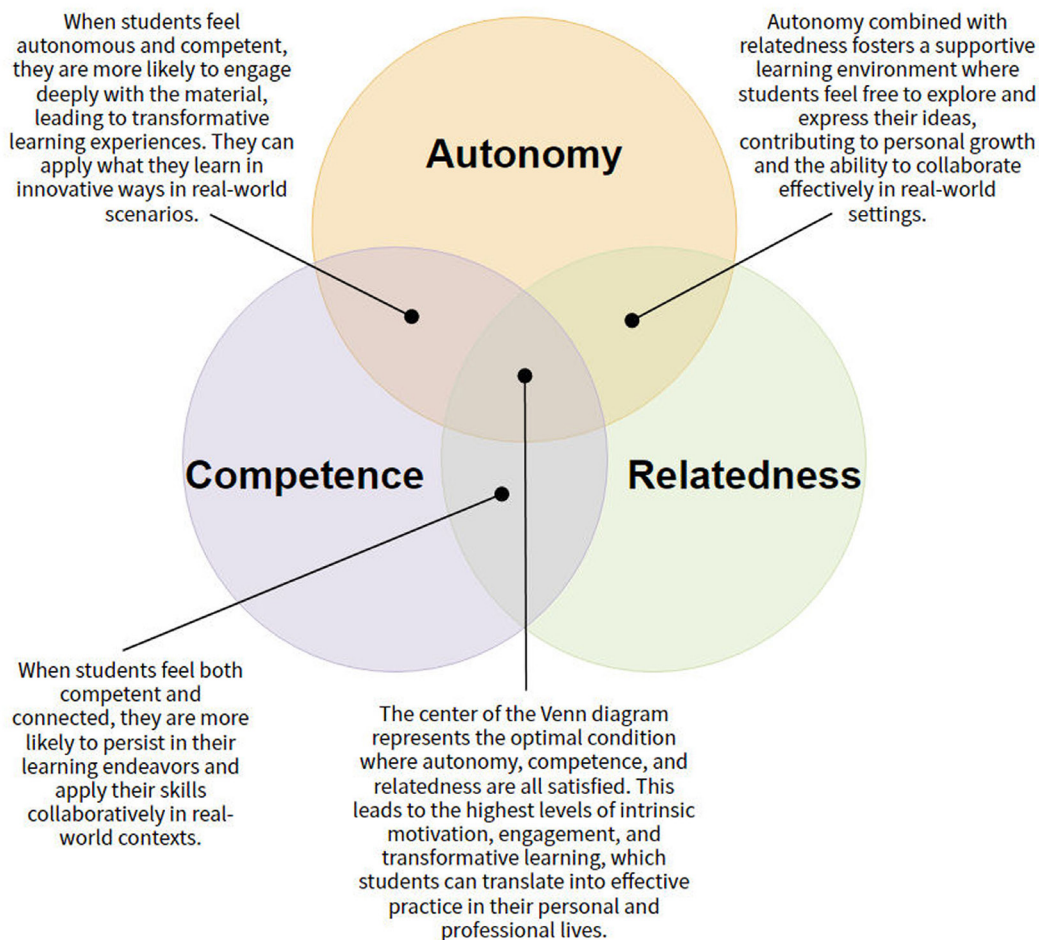


FIGURE 1 | Intersection of Self-Determination Theory's basic psychological needs in online education: fostering intrinsic motivation for transformative learning and real-world application.

Note: Created by the authors; adapted from Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M. & Soenens, B. (2020).

learning environment, where students feel empowered to make choices, confident in their abilities, and connected to their peers and instructors. When these conditions are met, students are more likely to engage in deep learning, develop critical thinking skills, and apply their knowledge to real-world problems. As Vansteenkiste et al. (2020) emphasize, creating online learning environments that foster autonomy, competence, and relatedness is crucial for promoting intrinsic motivation and transformative learning.

The three basic psychological needs are influential in fostering intrinsic motivation. As illustrated in Figure 2, the fulfillment of these needs, either individually or in combination, contributes to a strong sense of intrinsic motivation. When individuals feel empowered to make choices (autonomy), believe in their abilities (competence), and feel connected to others (relatedness), they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated to engage in activities and tasks.

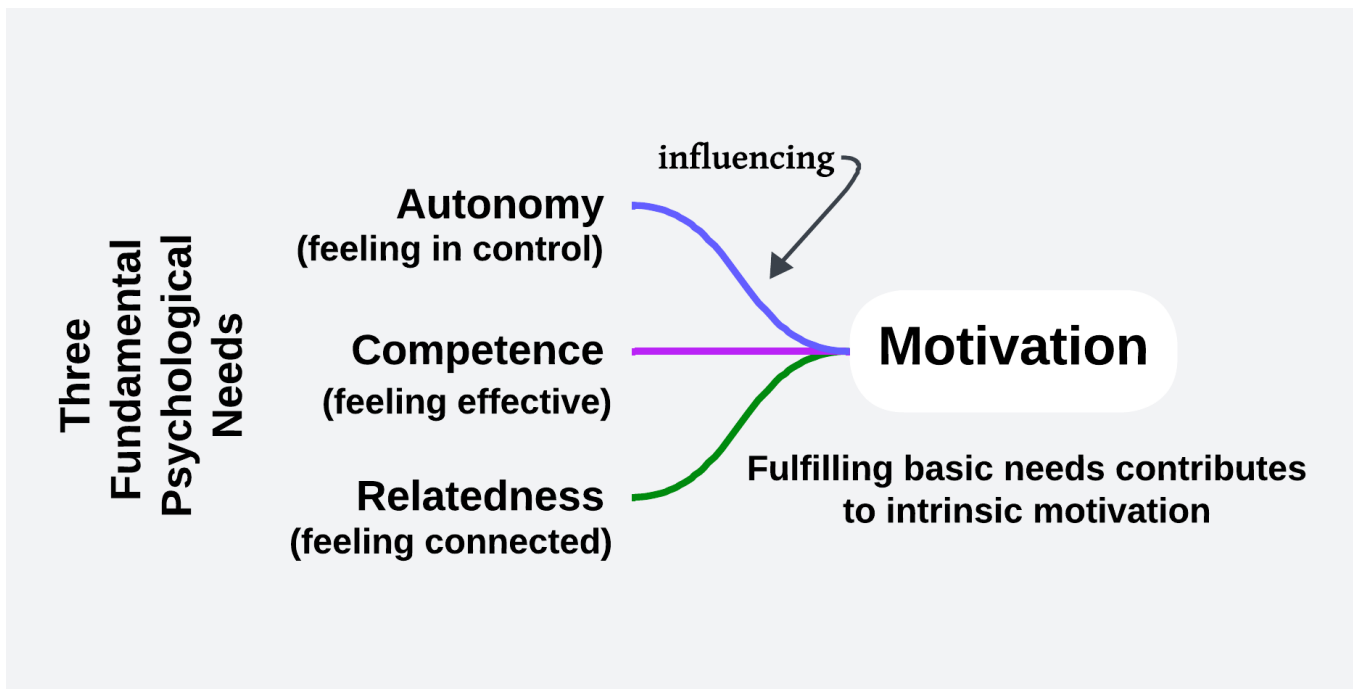


FIGURE 2 | Self-Determination Theory proposes Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness as core psychological needs fostering intrinsic motivation.

Note: Created by the authors; adapted from Vansteenkiste, M., Ryan, R. M. & Soenens, B. (2020).

Practical Implications

The theory’s practical implications extend to various domains, including education, workplace dynamics, and healthcare. By creating environments that support these basic psychological needs, leaders and institutions can foster autonomous motivation and, consequently, enhance and transform learning (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

The Evolving Role of the Instructor

The transition to online learning demands a fundamental shift in the instructor’s role from knowledge transmitter to facilitator and community builder. While offering flexibility, online environments

can isolate students, necessitating strategies to foster engagement and community (Chung et al., 2022; Hamilton & Zimmerman, 2002; Sun et al., 2023). By adopting interactive, student-centered approaches, instructors can create inclusive and equitable learning experiences, addressing the digital divide and enhancing student outcomes (Blau et al., 2020; Heilporn et al., 2021). Scaling these practices could help improve retention, achievement, and post-graduation success.

The Crucial Role of Self-Directed Learning in Online Settings

While online education offers undeniable advantages, success in this environment hinges on students’ ability to take ownership of their learning journey. Self-

directed learning (SDL) emerges as a critical factor in online achievement. Studies suggest that students with strong SDL skills outperform their peers in online programs (Sun et al., 2023). By understanding how students set goals, manage their time effectively, and navigate online resources, the study aims to illuminate how fostering SDL can empower online learners to excel academically and develop the perseverance needed to thrive in the digital learning landscape, thereby engaging in transformative learning.

Fostering Collaborative Learning in Online Environments

Collaborative learning (COL) involves students working in small groups to explore and apply course material (Smith & MacGreger, 1992). This focus on interdependence and shared goals distinguishes COL from traditional group work, where tasks can be divided and completed independently (Slavin, 1995). In COL activities, achieving a common goal relies on the reciprocal contributions of all group members. By strategically incorporating COL activities that cater to different student learning preferences, higher education institutions can nurture a sense of community and relatedness, potentially boosting intrinsic motivation and academic success.

The Impact of Student Isolation in Online Learning

Online learners' success refers to the knowledge, skills, and abilities students acquire through online coursework and their ability to apply them independently (Chung et al., 2022). Unlike traditional classroom settings, online environments require students' self-directed learning (Asif et al., 2022). While offering flexibility and convenience, the online learning environment can also present unique challenges. Online learners may struggle with isolation and lack the structured support systems readily available in physical spaces (Hamilton & Zimmerman, 2002). Understanding the effect of student isolation (ISO), often a byproduct of limited face-to-face interaction, and leveraging the potential of collaborative learning environments can inform the development of online learning experiences that promote academic resilience.

Online university settings can create isolation that harms a student's sense of autonomy (choice, control), competence (progress, practice), and relatedness

(social connection, instructor connection). This lack of fulfillment in SDT's core psychological needs leads to decreased motivation, with students becoming disengaged, procrastinating more, and even dropping out.

Academic Achievement in Online Higher Education

Academic achievement (AA) in online higher education remains a topic of ongoing research. While some studies suggest online learning can be equally effective (Astin, 1985; Astin, 1993; Astin, 1997), others highlight challenges specific to the online environment (Kalyanasundaram & Madhavi, 2020). As already mentioned, this study builds on the self-determination theory to examine three key online learning variables (SDL, COL, ISO), influence on academic resilience (AR) and academic achievement (AA) at the University of Phoenix.

In the context of online learning, SDL empowers students to take ownership of their learning, potentially leading to a stronger sense of competence and increased motivation. Conversely, student isolation can hinder relatedness and sense of community, potentially impacting motivation and ultimately, academic achievement. Collaborative activities, on the other hand, can foster a sense of connection and shared learning, potentially boosting motivation and academic outcomes.

By analyzing student data, this study may lead to uncovering various combinations of the variables and the influence on academic achievement (AA). We expect to discover not only the individual, but also the combined effects of SDL, COL, and ISO on AA. This knowledge can inform the design of online learning environments at University of Phoenix that promote student autonomy, collaboration, and a sense of community, leading to improved academic achievement for students.

When online courses give students control over their learning (autonomy), provide opportunities to develop mastery (competence), and foster connections with instructors and peers (relatedness), students are more likely to become self-directed learners, engage in collaborative learning, and mitigate isolation that can often accompany online learning environments. SDT explains how fulfilling students' core psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness in online universities can boost academic achievement.

Academic Resilience in Online Higher Education

This study investigates the concept of academic resilience (AR) in online higher education, focusing on how students navigate challenges and maintain motivation in the face of adversity. Building upon the work of Sari and Siswandari (2022), this research explores the influence of factors like self-directed and collaborative learning alongside student isolation on academic resilience. By examining these factors, the

study aims to illuminate the characteristics that foster resilience among online learners. Students who are in control of their learning (autonomy), believe in their ability to succeed (competence), and are connected to others (relatedness) are more likely to persevere in online courses. The core aspects of SDT fuel intrinsic motivation and consequently academic resilience, allowing students to bounce back from challenges, learn independently, collaborate effectively, and mitigate isolation in online settings.

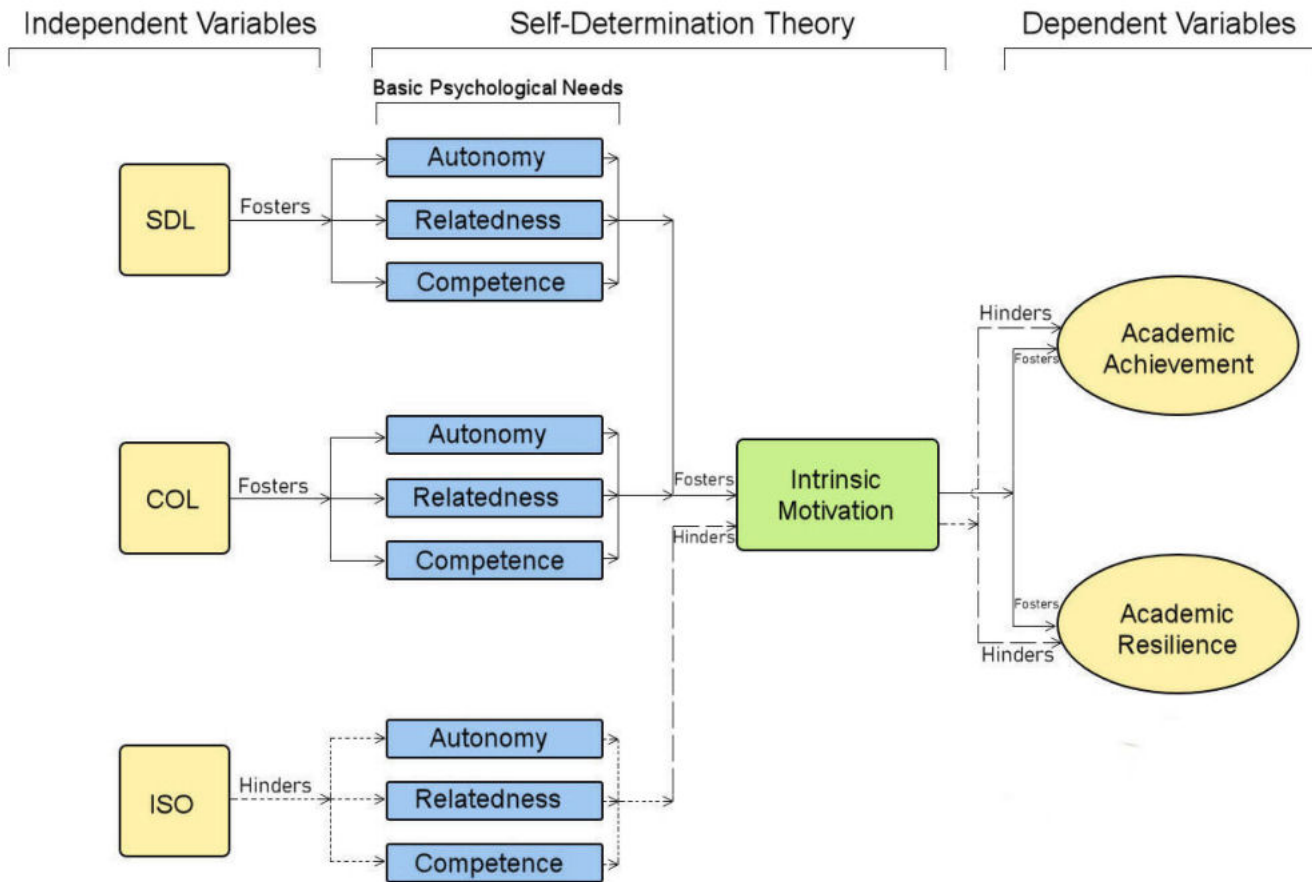


FIGURE 3 | Self-Determination Theory as it relates to this study. SDL = Self-Directed Learning, COL = Collaborative Learning, ISO = Student Isolation.

Note: Created by the authors; based on Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2017).

Figure 3 illustrates the hypothesized relationships between our research variables (SDL, COL, ISO, AA, and AR) and self-determination theory. The diagram proposes that self-directed learning and collaborative learning foster the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. These needs, in turn, are expected to cultivate intrinsic motivation,

which positively influences academic achievement (AA) and academic resilience (AR). Conversely, student isolation (ISO) is anticipated to hinder the fulfillment of these psychological needs, having a detrimental effect on intrinsic motivation and, consequently, poorer academic outcomes.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Question 1

Do self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation influence academic achievement of undergraduate online degree program students at University of Phoenix?

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation do not influence academic achievement of undergraduate online degree program students at University of Phoenix.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): Self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation influence academic achievement of undergraduate online degree program students at University of Phoenix.

Research Question 2

Do self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation influence academic resilience of undergraduate online degree program students at University of Phoenix?

Null Hypothesis (H_0): Self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation do not influence academic resilience of undergraduate online degree program students at University of Phoenix.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): Self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation influence academic resilience of undergraduate online degree program students at University of Phoenix.

Methods and Design

This quantitative study intends to employ multi-variable regression analysis to examine the influence of self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and student isolation on academic achievement and academic resilience among undergraduate online students at the University of Phoenix. Given the Likert-scale format of the survey instruments, we anticipate the response data may exhibit skewness and thus deviate from a normal distribution.

To assess the appropriateness of multi-variable regression analysis, we will conduct normality tests on the residuals of the model. Additionally, we will examine each variable for normality. We will also

check other assumptions of multi-variable regression, including linearity of relationships, homoscedasticity of residuals, and absence of multicollinearity among predictors. These tests will be conducted for each of the three independent variables and two dependent variables in our study. If the assumptions of this parametric test are not met, we will explore alternative robust regression techniques or nonparametric methods to analyze the relationships between the variables.

Variables: The study variables are measured using validated questionnaires that adhere to established psychometric principles, ensuring the reliability and validity of the collected data. Likert-scale items are used to facilitate quantitative analysis and allow participants to express their level of agreement or disagreement with statements pertaining to the research questions. Reliability will be assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Validity checks, including construct and content validity assessments, will be conducted on each instrument to ensure their appropriateness for measuring the intended constructs in our specific research context.

Sampling

A non-probability convenience sampling technique will be employed to recruit participants. This method was chosen due to its feasibility and appropriateness for our study. Based on a power analysis conducted using G*Power software, the goal included a recruitment of a minimum of 120 participants. Eligible criteria included: 1) participants currently enrolled as students in five university colleges (Education, General Studies, Health Professions, Nursing, and Social and Behavioral Sciences) who have completed classes that included team assignments. The College of Business and Information Technology was excluded to avoid overlapping with other research teams and to prevent overwhelming students with multiple research requests. Recruitment was conducted through university email lists. While this sampling method may limit generalizability, it allows us to efficiently reach our target population within the constraints of the study and institutional guidelines.

Data Collection

The data collection process was implemented through a secure online survey platform, which not only

ensures participant anonymity but also enhances accessibility and efficiency in data gathering. This methodological approach aligns with contemporary best practices in educational research, particularly in the context of online learning environments. In addition to the primary study variables, the survey instrument was designed to capture essential participant demographic information. This included gender, age, first-generation university student status, college affiliation within the university, and current employment status.

The inclusion of these demographic variables serves multiple purposes: it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the sample population, enables subgroup analyses to identify potential moderating factors, and enhances the generalizability of the study's findings. By collecting this set of data, the research provides a holistic view of the key factors influencing academic achievement and academic resilience among undergraduate online students, while also accounting for the diverse backgrounds and experiences within the student population.

Data Analysis

The study will employ multi-variable regression analysis to assess the relationships between the independent variables (SDL, CO, ISO) and the dependent variables (AA, AR). This statistical technique allows for the examination of multiple predictor variables simultaneously, providing insights into their collective coupled and individual impacts on the outcome variables.

Recognizing the potential for violations of parametric assumptions, we will also incorporate nonparametric analyses as a contingency plan. Should the data fail to meet the assumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, or the absence of significant outliers, we may utilize techniques such as quantile regression, generalized additive models (GAMs), or bootstrapping methods. This comprehensive analytical strategy ensures that we can derive meaningful insights from the data, regardless of its distributional properties, thereby enhancing the robustness and generalizability of our findings in the context of online higher education research.

Measuring instruments were evaluated individually for reliability. The regression models were assessed for overall significance, strength of relationships, and

individual variable contributions through standardized and unstandardized coefficients. This approach enabled a comprehensive understanding of how the independent variables may influence the outcomes.

To ensure the robustness and reliability of the regression analysis, a comprehensive assessment of collinearity among the independent variables will be conducted. This crucial step in the data analysis process serves to identify and quantify potential linear relationships between predictor variables, which could otherwise compromise the accuracy and interpretability of the regression coefficients. In cases where collinearity is detected, appropriate remedial measures, such as variable centering, principal component analysis, or thoughtful variable selection, will be considered to mitigate its impact on the regression model's validity and interpretative power.

Results

The current study is a work in progress. Data collection is complete and data analysis is underway at this time.

Discussion

The application of the self-determination theory in online learning environments has been supported by recent research. Yurdal and Toraman (2023) demonstrated a strong correlation between self-directed learning, academic achievement, and motivation in adult learners. Their findings suggest that when adults have more control over their learning process, they are more likely to achieve better results and maintain a positive attitude towards education. This aligns with SDT's emphasis on autonomy as a crucial factor in fostering intrinsic motivation and optimal performance.

Furthermore, Wood (2016) provided insights into the complex interplay of SDT's three basic psychological needs within structured educational environments. The study reported that autonomy is an outcome of both relatedness and competence, highlighting the interconnected nature of these needs. This research (Wood, 2016) underscores the importance of considering all three needs - autonomy, competence, and relatedness - when designing online learning experiences, as they interact with and influence each other. These studies illustrate how SDT principles can be successfully applied in online learning contexts

to enhance student motivation, engagement, and academic outcomes. By fostering environments that support autonomy, competence, and relatedness, educators can create more effective and engaging online learning experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to strict ethical research principles according to the Declaration of Helsinki, the World Medical Association (WMA, 2022; WMA, 2023), and the Belmont Report (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2022) concerning research and human subjects. Prior to data collection, approval from the University of Phoenix Committee on Research (COR), University of Phoenix Institutional Review Board (IRB # 2187121-1), and the legal compliance team, was obtained. Informed consent was obtained from participants; clearly outlined the study's purpose, potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. All data collected was anonymous and securely stored. Access was limited to authorized research personnel.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. The use of non-probability sampling, specifically a convenience sample, introduces selection bias. To mitigate this, future research efforts may explore collaborations with online learning platforms to reach a more geographically diverse participant pool. The reliance on self-reported data presents the possibility of social desirability and recall bias where students may unintentionally misreport their behaviors or experiences.

Future studies may incorporate mixed methods approaches that include interviews or focus groups to triangulate findings and enhance data quality. Another identified limitation involves the restricted sample population. While the survey was distributed to 25,450 undergraduate students across five colleges (Education, General Studies, Health Professions, Nursing, Social and Behavioral Sciences), the exclusion of the College of Business and Information Technology represented a notable gap of the target population affecting the findings. Focusing on a single

university limits the generalizability and the external validity of the research. Expanding the participant pool to include students from a wider range of institutions and backgrounds and a longitudinal design that follows students over time would strengthen the generalizability of the findings and allow for the exploration of causal relationships.

The presence of unmeasured confounding variables remains a possible limitation. These are external factors that may influence study variables and thus distort the observed relationships. Once they have been identified, statistical techniques including but not limited to propensity score matching can be employed in future studies to account for their potential influences. Finally, researcher bias can influence the design or interpretation of the study. Employing a collaborative research approach with diverse perspectives can help mitigate this potential bias.

Implications and Significance

The findings of this study hold significance implications for transforming online learning practices to benefit diverse communities of interest, including students, faculty, and administrators, with the potential to cultivate a more collaborative and inclusive online learning environment, thereby improving academic achievement and academic resilience. For University of Phoenix students, the research can inform the development of personalized learning experiences that empower them to leverage university resources and foster a sense of community. University of Phoenix faculty and administrators can utilize the results to tailor instruction to diverse learning styles, develop strategies to mitigate student isolation, and implement targeted support services, thus employing a transformative learning practice.

On a broader scale, this research contributes to best practices in online learning by highlighting the importance of fostering student autonomy, belonging, and collaborative learning approaches. This research has the potential to transform online education by empowering students as self-directed learners and fostering a sense of belonging, thereby contributing to a more equitable and inclusive online learning experience. For further implications for policymakers and educators, request Supplement A from the authors.

Strengths of the Study

There are several strengths of this study. The transformative learning approach focuses on factors that cultivate student motivation and empowerment, contributing to a more equitable and inclusive online learning environment. The self-determination theory provides a robust framework for understanding student motivation and psychological needs in online learning.

The findings have the potential to bridge the gap between research and practice involving online learning environments, fostering student success and well-being. By examining both academic achievement and academic resilience as outcome variables, the study provides a more comprehensive view of student success in online education.

Furthermore, this study aims to deepen our understanding of undergraduate persistence in the online learning environment by examining the influence of key learning factors on student success. The transformative nature of this research lies in its potential to challenge existing paradigms in online education. Traditional assumptions about student engagement and success in online classrooms may be called into question, leading to a changing worldview of how we approach online course design and student support systems. This aligns with the study's overall objective to not only identify factors influencing student success but also to contribute to the evolution of online education practices.

Future Research Directions

The present study provides a foundation for future research aimed at enhancing online learning experiences through the lens of self-determination theory. Subsequent investigations could explore optimal combinations of self-directed, collaborative, and social learning to optimize academic outcomes and resilience. Technological innovations such as generative artificial intelligence, ChatGPT4, and adaptive learning platforms present opportunities to personalize the online learning environment. Additionally, research addressing student isolation and belonging can inform targeted support strategies. While this study focused on a single university, future research should encompass a broader population to

deepen understanding of equitable online learning environments. Longitudinal studies can illuminate evolving student needs, enabling tailored support throughout the online learning journey. The ongoing nature of this research allows for unexpected discoveries that may open new avenues of inquiry.

Conclusion

Based on our research findings and the principles of self-determination theory, future recommendations are proposed for transforming the university environment to foster student agency and growth. These strategies are designed to enhance autonomy, competence, and relatedness, thereby promoting intrinsic motivation and academic success (Supplement A). While the results are yet to be finalized, the potential implications of this research extend beyond the immediate realm of online education, contributing to broader societal issues such as digital equity. Improved strategies for supporting online learners could lead to increased educational opportunities for non-traditional students, working professionals, and those in geographically remote areas.

This study may contribute to transformative research and practice in online education by offering theory-based recommendations for educators and policymakers. By focusing on enhancing student self-determination and addressing the unique challenges of online learning, we hope to identify strategies that have the potential to significantly improve student outcomes and create more inclusive and effective online learning environments. As we complete our analysis, we look forward to sharing concrete findings that will further inform us of these recommendations and their potential impact.

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Dr. Darbyshire is a fellow with the Center for Educational and Instructional Technology Research (CEITR). She is a National Society of Leadership Success member and a long-time Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing member. In addition, Dr. Darbyshire is a member of the Association

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Mr. Beitsayadeh is a seasoned academic and industry professional with a rich history in both education and technology. He obtained a Master of Science degree in Mechanical Engineering from San Jose State University. As a practitioner faculty member at the University of Phoenix, he has dedicated over two decades of higher education teaching experience. Recognized for his exceptional contributions to teaching, he is a two-time recipient of the prestigious Phoenix500 Award and a 2023 Faculty of the Year nominee. His research at the Center for Educational and Instructional Technology Research (CEITR) focuses on optimizing the learning experience through the exploration of memory consolidation, adult learning, and metacognitive skill development. Beyond academia, Mr. Beitsayadeh brings a wealth of industry experience, including a successful career in food processing. He holds patents in food processing technology. His profound expertise in the field, combined with a rigorous academic foundation, affords him a distinctive perspective on innovation and problem-solving.

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Breaking Barriers: A Study Exploring the Impact of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Initiatives on Gender Disparities in the Workplace

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Abstract

This study investigates the effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in addressing gender disparities in leadership across the education, healthcare, and technology sectors. Employing an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, the research combines qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus groups with DEI officers, HR managers, and female leaders, and quantitative data from surveys assessing employee attitudes. The study's conceptual framework integrates Social Identity Theory, Intersectionality Theory, and Leadership Pipeline Theory to explore the dynamics of DEI programs and their impact on reducing gender disparities in leadership roles. Key findings in the literature suggest that the framing of DEI initiatives, whether as affirmative action or as a competitive advantage, significantly influences employee support and backlash. Additionally, the research highlights the varying effectiveness of DEI initiatives across industries, with the technology sector facing the greatest challenges. This study aims to provide actionable insights for organizations to craft and implement DEI initiatives that are both effective and widely accepted, thereby contributing to more inclusive and equitable workplaces. The findings will offer valuable guidance for scholars and practitioners in promoting gender equity and improving organizational culture and leadership diversity.

Recent research underscores the multifaceted impacts of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives within organizational settings. For instance, Rohden (2023) explores how DEI enhances organizational quality of life and profitability, while Smith and De Leon (2023) analyze the correlation between diverse leadership and financial performance. Regardless of existing research, there remains a critical need to further explore how different justifications for DEI programs affect employee perceptions and organizational outcomes. This need is emphasized by societal and legislative changes, as discussed by Murray et al. (2023), addressing anti-DEI legislation and its impact on educational and corporate environments.

Despite significant efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) across various sectors, the effectiveness of these initiatives in reducing gender disparities in leadership roles is still a subject of debate. Research such as Horowitz (n.d.) and Kidder et al. (2004) has highlighted ongoing challenges in achieving equitable representation in top management positions, despite institutional commitments to DEI. This issue is particularly pressing as societal and political pressures may threaten the continuation of these programs. The article “Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter (Quick Take)” (n.d.) underscores the potential risks associated with dismantling DEI initiatives, suggesting that such a move could reverse progress toward more inclusive workplaces.

This study aims to provide actionable insights that can guide organizations in crafting and implementing DEI initiatives that are not only effective but also widely accepted and supported by diverse employee groups.

The broad problem is the varying effectiveness and reception of DEI programs across different sectors and cultural contexts. Specifically, this study investigates how the framing of these programs (e.g., affirmative action vs. diversity as a competitive advantage) influences backlash and support within organizations.

While existing studies have explored the outcomes of DEI initiatives, there is a gap in understanding how different justifications for these programs influence individual and group backlash or support. This gap limits the ability of organizations to effectively implement such initiatives.

This study will utilize a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative data from surveys assessing employee attitudes and qualitative interviews to gain

deeper insights into the motivations behind these attitudes. This approach will allow for a comprehensive analysis of the impacts of program justification on employee responses and organizational commitment. By addressing these components, the study aims to contribute significantly to the field of organizational management, particularly in improving the effectiveness and acceptance of DEI initiatives.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this mixed-methods study is grounded in theories and models pertaining to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) as well as gender disparities in leadership roles. This framework provides a structured approach to understanding the perceived effectiveness of DEI programs in organizations and their impact on reducing gender disparities in leadership. It integrates qualitative insights with quantitative validation to offer a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation.

Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social Identity Theory posits that individuals derive a sense of identity and self-esteem from their group memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory is relevant as it helps explain how DEI programs can influence organizational culture and individual behavior by fostering a sense of belonging and reducing biases. Understanding how employees from diverse backgrounds perceive their identity within the organization can provide insights into the effectiveness of DEI initiatives (Ellemers et al., 2002). The theory is applied to understand dynamics within organizations, such as team cohesion, leadership, and diversity management. It highlights the importance of fostering a positive group identity to enhance organizational performance and employee well-being (Harwood, 2020).

Intersectionality Theory

Intersectionality theory highlights how various social identities (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity) intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1989). This theory guides the exploration of how DEI programs address the multifaceted nature of identity and inequality, particularly in leadership roles. DEI programs informed by intersectionality theory recognize the diverse and intersecting

identities of employees. Intersectionality encourages a holistic approach to inclusion, where the goal is not only to increase representation but also to create an environment where all individuals feel valued and supported (Else-Quest et al., 2016).

Leadership Pipeline Theory

This theory examines the progression of individuals through organizational hierarchies and the barriers they face (Ragins et al., 1998). Leadership Pipeline theory helps explore how DEI programs can influence the leadership pipeline, particularly for women in underrepresented groups. Recent research highlights the importance of considering various forms of capital and the role of organizational practices in supporting or hindering the progression of diverse talent within organizations. By integrating DEI principles into leadership development and succession planning processes, organizations can create more inclusive and effective leadership pipelines (Fitzsimmons et al., 2016). This research is also grounded in two research constructs; specifically perceived effectiveness of DEI Programs and gender disparities in leadership.

Perceived Effectiveness of DEI Programs

Dimensions include awareness, inclusivity, support mechanisms, and measurable outcomes. These constructs will be explored qualitatively to understand the participants' experiences and perceptions.

Gender Disparities in Leadership

Examines the presence, progression, and barriers faced by women in leadership roles. The study will assess how DEI programs impact these disparities.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methods, the study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how these initiatives influence organizational culture and leadership diversity. The findings will offer valuable insights for both scholars and practitioners seeking to promote equity and inclusion in the workplace.

Research Methodology

The research study aimed to investigate and evaluate the effectiveness of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives in addressing gender disparities in leadership roles across three industries: education, healthcare, and technology. A Exploratory Sequential Mixed Method Design (Creswell et al., 2017) will be

employed, combining basic interpretive qualitative analysis and quantitative factor analysis, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing DEI outcomes and their effectiveness in promoting gender equity in leadership. The research questions for this study are:

1. How effective has DEI been in addressing gender disparities in leadership positions over the past decade?
2. What is the value of DEI as a tool to impact gender disparities in leadership roles across different industries?
3. What might be the impact of dismantling DEI programs on gender disparities in leadership positions?

The research focuses on three key industries: education, healthcare, and technology. These industries were selected based on a review of the literature, which indicates varying levels of DEI initiative effectiveness. DEI initiatives in education were found to be moderately effective, with strong leadership commitment but varied implementation success. The healthcare industry showed higher perceived organizational support for DEI initiatives. However, challenges remain in achieving equal career advancement opportunities. The technology industry faced the greatest challenges, with lower overall effectiveness of DEI initiatives. Issues such as bias and lack of an inclusive culture were more pronounced, despite substantial investments in DEI programs.

The target population for this study includes women in leadership roles at the Vice President level or higher, including Vice Provost positions in education. The sample size consists of 15 participants, recruited using purposive and snowball sampling through social media platforms like LinkedIn and Indeed. The recruitment process will involve sharing a flyer through networks and using virtual video platforms like Zoom for interviews.

Qualitative Phase

The qualitative phase employs a basic interpretive qualitative research approach, which seeks to understand social phenomena through participants' perspectives, experiences, and meanings. This method emphasizes exploring subjective realities and the context in which they occur, aiming to uncover the deeper meanings underlying human actions and interactions. Techniques such as in-depth interviews,

observations, and document analysis will gather rich, descriptive data.

Semi-structured interviews and focus groups will be conducted with DEI officers, HR managers, and female leaders across the three industries. The qualitative data will be analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and insights regarding the implementation and perceived impact of DEI initiatives.

Quantitative Phase

Findings from the qualitative study will be used to complete Phase Two, which will employ a quantitative aspect of the exploratory sequential mixed methods study. This phase focuses on developing a valid instrument for assessing practitioner knowledge about the impact of DEI in the workplace. The developed survey will be distributed to a broader sample of employees within each industry to quantitatively assess the effectiveness of DEI initiatives. Based on the literature, the survey will include items measuring perceptions of DEI initiatives, experiences of gender equity, and leadership opportunities. Factor analysis will be applied to the survey data to identify underlying dimensions of DEI effectiveness.

Ethical Concerns

The ethical considerations of this study are paramount, ensuring that all participants from DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) companies are treated with respect, confidentiality, and integrity throughout the research process. All participants will be provided with comprehensive information about the study's objectives, methods, potential risks, and benefits. They will be asked to provide informed consent before participating, ensuring they understand their role and the voluntary nature of their involvement.

The confidentiality of all participants will be strictly maintained. Personal identifiers will be removed from data sets, and participants will be assigned unique codes to protect their identity. Data will be stored securely, and only authorized personnel will have access to it. Moreover, participation in the study is entirely voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. They will be informed that their decision to participate or withdraw will not affect their relationship with

their employer or any benefits they receive from their company. Participants will be kept informed about the progress of the research and the outcomes of the study. This transparency will help build trust and ensure participants feel valued and respected.

In addition, the study will be designed to minimize any potential risks to participants. This includes psychological, social, and professional risks. Any foreseeable risks will be clearly communicated to participants, and measures will be taken to mitigate them. The research will adhere to the principles of beneficence and non-maleficence, striving to maximize benefits and minimize harm. The findings will aim to contribute positively to the understanding and improvement of DEI initiatives within companies.

The study will be reviewed and approved by an institutional ethics review board to ensure that all ethical standards are met. This review process will help identify and address any potential ethical issues before the study begins.

By adhering to these ethical principles, the study aims to create a safe and respectful environment for all participants, ultimately contributing to the advancement of effective DEI strategies in the workplace.

Significance

This study is significant as it will provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of DEI initiatives in addressing gender disparities in leadership positions. The findings will help organizations make informed decisions regarding the implementation and maintenance of DEI programs, as well as understand the potential consequences of dismantling such initiatives. According to van Anders et al. (2022), "we believe that studies not only create knowledge that leads to social change, but also be sites of social change themselves." Additionally, this research will contribute to the existing literature on DEI in the workplace, providing a better understanding of the impact of these initiatives on gender disparities in leadership.

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Use of Generative AI in Maximizing Engagement in Online Higher Education



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Abstract

Generative artificial intelligence (AI) is rapidly emerging in the academic field impacting student engagement. AI can be a valuable resource for higher education students; however, institutions raise concerns about the ethical use of AI and the validity of course assessments. The purpose of this study is to investigate how higher education students use AI to maximize engagement. Specifically, the research question is, *do higher education students use generative AI to maximize learning experiences, enhance inadequate academic skills, or support a shortage of study time?* The methodology for this research is quantitative, cross-sectional, and correlational, and the data will be analyzed with descriptive and cluster analysis. The findings aim to inform students, faculty, and administrators on effective strategies for integrating AI into education, enhancing student learning and engagement, effectively assessing learning, and ensuring student preparedness for an AI-driven workplace.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly emerging in the academic field and impacts student engagement. This article will share research study findings focused on how AI technologies are revolutionizing student engagement and learning outcomes. Specifically, the aim of this research is to identify how the use of generative artificial intelligence systems enhance

student engagement in higher education courses. The findings of this research can improve students' understanding regarding appropriate use of generative AI; faculties and curriculum developers can better understand how students use generative AI and optimize assessments to assure students' learning; university administrators can enhance existing

policies to assure appropriate use of generative AI.

How is AI Impacting Online Student Engagement?

Generative AI systems is a powerful tool that generates text, image, audio, video, source code, etc. Generative AI as a subset of Deep Learning (DL) is using complex algorithms, massive training data, computational power, and neural networks mimicking the human brain. Platforms like Generative Adversarial Networks (GANs), Variational Autoencoders (VAEs), Autoregressive models (e.g., PixelCNN, WaveNet), Flow-based models (e.g., RealNVP, Glow), Generative Pre-trained Transformer (GPT) series (e.g., GPT-2, GPT-3) host a plethora of pre-trained generative models and code repositories that enable users to experiment with and deploy generative AI applications. Generative AI has become a valuable aid for students in higher education due to its free access, ease of use, and immediate benefits. With content generation at every student's fingertips, institutions are raising concerns about the ethical use of AI and validity of course assessments. The integration of AI into education is also transforming teaching and learning in a way that is rapidly changing research and practice. The purpose of this study is to investigate how online higher education students use generative AI to maximize engagement. Even though generative AI techniques have been in development for several decades, their availability on the Internet has become more prevalent in recent years. A cross-sectional study will be conducted among online higher education students. A survey will be emailed to current students who have recently completed at least three out of five of the following general education courses: ENG/110: English Composition I, HUM/115: Critical Thinking in Everyday Life, MTH/215: Quantitative Reasoning I, PSY/110: Psychology of Learning, and SCI/163T: Elements of Health and Wellness at the University of Phoenix for data collection. Python programming will be used for statistical analysis. Exploratory factor analysis will be performed to identify the factors that drove online higher education students to use generative AI and how they maximized their engagement. Descriptive statistical analysis will be performed for the collected data and a regression analysis will determine the strength of the relationship between multiple independent variables and one dependent variable.

Integrating Theoretical Frameworks

This research project explores integrating theoretical frameworks to understand the use of generative AI in online higher education. The Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), developed by Fred Davis (1989), helps predict users' attitudes toward new technologies by focusing on perceived ease of use and usefulness. In education, TAM aids in assessing students' acceptance of AI tools.

Engagement Theory emphasizes active involvement and emotional investment in learning. It evaluates AI tools' impact on student engagement, highlighting cognitive involvement and social interaction. AI can enhance learning experiences by promoting active engagement (Kearsley & Schneiderman, 1999).

Cognitive Load Theory (CLT), by John Sweller, focuses on managing cognitive resources during learning. It distinguishes between cognitive load types and suggests minimizing extraneous load while maximizing germane load. This theory is crucial for designing AI tools that adapt to students' cognitive needs, enhancing learning effectiveness.

Substitution Theory examines how new technologies replace existing methods, leading to changes in behavior. In higher education, it analyzes AI tools like virtual tutors and automated grading systems, impacting learning processes.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT), by Deci and Ryan, underscores autonomy, competence, and relatedness for motivation. SDT highlights creating supportive environments that enhance students' intrinsic motivation and academic achievement.

The Adaptation-Augmentation-Substitution Model (AASM) provides insights into how technologies impact educational practices, examining how AI tools adapt, augment, or substitute traditional practices.

Social Learning Theory, by Albert Bandura, emphasizes observation and modeling in learning. It supports using AI to facilitate collaborative learning and knowledge sharing, fostering community and engagement, and enhancing students' learning experiences and academic success.

AI in Higher Education: Trends, Theories, and Applications

The literature on artificial intelligence (AI) in education reveals a growing interest in understanding its impact on teaching and learning processes. Gillani et al. (2023) delves into the complexities of AI in education, emphasizing the need to “unpack the black box” for understanding how AI algorithms influence educational outcomes and the ethical considerations involved. This aligns with Davis and Granic’s (2024) comprehensive review of the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM), which has been pivotal over the past 30 years in understanding how users come to accept and use technology, including AI in educational settings.

Quaye, Harper, and Pendakur (2020) provide insights into student engagement, a crucial factor when integrating AI in higher education. Their work underscores the importance of considering diverse student populations and their unique engagement needs. Paas and Sweller (2020) offer a cognitive load theory perspective, highlighting how multimedia learning, enhanced by AI tools, can either alleviate or exacerbate cognitive load depending on the design and implementation.

Chen and Patel (2022) contribute to the discourse by applying behavioral economics to AI, exploring how substitution theory can inform our understanding of AI’s role in replacing traditional educational methods. Similarly, Weinstein and Ryan (2021) examine the implications of AI through the lens of self-determination theory, particularly how AI-mediated smartphone use affects student well-being and motivation.

Lu and Yang (2023) propose the Adaptation-Augmentation-Substitution Model to evaluate AI’s impact on human resource management, offering a framework that could be adapted to assess AI in educational contexts. Meanwhile, Chen et al. (2020) provide a broad review of AI applications in education, highlighting key trends and future directions. Their work is complemented by Chen et al. (2023), who explore the design of AI student assistants, such as chatbots, to support student success in the classroom.

Chiu et al. (2023) investigate the role of teacher support and student motivation in learning with AI-based chatbots, emphasizing the importance of educator involvement in AI integration. Darvishi et al.

(2024) further examine AI’s impact on student agency, suggesting that AI can enhance or hinder student autonomy depending on its implementation.

Fitria (2021) discusses practical applications of AI tools in teaching and learning, providing a detailed account of how AI can be used to enhance educational practices. Kim, Lee, and Cho (2022) focus on learning design for AI-student collaboration, presenting insights from leading teachers on effective AI integration in education. Kumar and Raman (2022) explore student perceptions of AI in higher education, offering valuable feedback on students’ acceptance and concerns.

Vijayakumar et al. (2019) describe the development of an AI-based student bot for academic information systems, demonstrating a practical application of machine learning in education. Zhai et al. (2021) provide a decade-long review of AI in education, identifying key developments and future research areas. Collectively, these studies underscore the multifaceted nature of AI in education, highlighting its potential benefits and challenges in enhancing student learning and engagement.

Research Question and Hypotheses Testing

Based on the objectives of this research which are supported by gaps in prior in research as described in the prior sections, this study will address the following research question:

Do higher education students use generative AI to maximize learning experiences, enhance inadequate academic skills, or support a shortage of study time?

To answer this research question, hypothesis testing using multiple linear regression analysis. The dependent variable in this analysis will be the *Frequency of Generative AI model used*, while independent variables will include *Percentage score earned in the course used Generative AI the most, Confidence of reading comprehension skills, Confidence of writing skills, Confidence of mathematics skills, Confidence of computer skills, Hours of work, Hours with the family, Hours of study.*

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis Variables

- *Null Hypothesis H_0* : There is no correlation between the frequency of generative AI used and higher education students’ Percentage

score earned in the course used Generative AI the most, Confidence of reading comprehension skills, Confidence of writing skills, Confidence of mathematics skills, Confidence of computer skills, Hours of work, Hours with the family, Hours of study.

- *Alternative Hypothesis H_a* : There is correlation between the frequency of generative AI and higher education students' Percentage score earned in the course used Generative AI the most, Confidence of reading comprehension skills, Confidence of writing skills, Confidence of mathematics skills, Confidence of computer skills, Hours of work, Hours with the family, Hours of study.

The multiple linear regression analysis will help to determine whether students who frequently use generative AI do so to maximize their learning experience, better manage their time, improve their academic skills, or enhance their computer skills. The dependent variable in this analysis will be the frequency of generative AI use, while independent variables will include *Percentage score earned in the course used Generative AI the most, Confidence of reading comprehension skills, Confidence of writing skills, Confidence of mathematics skills, Confidence of computer skills, Hours of work, Hours with the family, Hours of study*. The model will be analyzed based on the slope and p-value of each individual variable, the correlation coefficient R and coefficient of determination R² of the model.

Relationship Between AI Use and Academic Rationale

The objective of this quantitative study is to collect and analyze data from undergraduate online classes at the University of Phoenix to investigate the usage and rationale of generative AI in selected general studies courses required for a student's program. Selected courses include: ENG/110, HUM/115, MTH/215, PSY/110, and SCI/163T. Students will be asked to complete an online survey to assess the relationships between the use of generative AI and the rationale for its use. The current study will invite 25,000 online students enrolled in bachelor's degree programs offered by the University of Phoenix, and the expected sample size should be equal to or larger than 380 students.

The basic design of the study is developed to identify

relationships between the use of generative AI and the rationale for student academic use within asynchronous, online, undergraduate courses. The proposed study is causative and cross-sectional for determining the actual effects generative AI has on the time, confidence, and perceptions students spend completing their coursework. A quantitative design is determined to be appropriate for the proposed study since it enables the collection of data from a large number of participants fitting a specific demographic profile (i.e., those who take online courses at the University of Phoenix; Creswell, 2003). Furthermore, a broad range of participants is necessary to ensure differences and commonalities were appropriately represented within the sample—as reflected by a power analysis. A linear model design will enable the researchers to fit a predictive model to an observed data set, evaluate relationships between variables, and infer the existence of that relationship with some degree of confidence. Therefore, descriptive statistical analysis will be performed on the collected data and a regression analysis will determine the strength of the relationship between multiple independent variables and one dependent variable.

Significance of AI in Online Student Learning

This study addresses a significant gap in the current literature regarding the rationale for utilization of generative AI in online higher education settings. By exploring how students employ AI technologies to augment their learning experiences, enhance academic skills, and manage time constraints, this research contributes to the growing body of knowledge on the intersection of AI and education.

The findings of this research will provide theoretical insights into the efficacy of generative AI tools in educational contexts. Understanding how students integrate AI into their learning processes can inform the development of new theoretical frameworks that account for the evolving role of technology in education. Additionally, the practical implications of this study can inform educators and policymakers about the potential benefits and challenges associated with incorporating AI tools into curricula.

Understanding how online higher education students leverage generative AI can have profound implications for society at large. As AI technologies continue to

shape various aspects of daily life, including education, it is crucial to examine its effects on learning outcomes, skill development, and time management. The insights gained from this study can inform educational practices aimed at preparing students for an AI-driven future workforce, ultimately contributing to societal progress and economic development.

The significance of this research extends beyond online higher education to encompass global educational contexts. With the increasing internationalization of online higher education and the widespread adoption of AI technologies worldwide, understanding how students engage with generative AI is essential. The findings of this study will inform educational practices not only within the online higher education context but also across international educational institutions, fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange on a global scale.

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Supporting Online Adjunct Faculty: A Crucial Exploratory Case Study of an Online Higher Education Institution

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Abstract

Online adjunct faculty face many unique challenges, playing a pivotal role in higher education. These include burnout, high course loads coupled with long work hours, increased student numbers, excessive administrative work, lack of training, high academic competition, role ambiguity, and lack of wellness-promoting activities in higher education. These challenges could potentially set back student outcomes. Given the growing dependence on online adjunct faculty, delving into these complex dynamics is crucial. This research aims to uncover the perceptions of existing supportive practices and to explore the evolution of these practices from the perspectives of adjunct faculty, college leaders, and archived information. This exploratory case study design offered a holistic view of online adjunct faculty support using surveys and archival documents to answer the research questions. The research questions aim to guide the discovery of multiple perspectives of adjunct faculty support. These perspectives include adjunct online faculty, college leaders, and support departments. Thematic analysis and triangulation allowed patterns and themes to emerge regarding current practices' efficacy and pinpoint improvement areas. This increased understanding can lead to enhanced teaching practices, better student learning experiences, success, and consideration for best supportive practices within online higher education.

Background

The evolution of online education continues to change the landscape of universities. With the increase of online courses, adjunct faculty has become more important to universities, and it is imperative to learn more about the struggles experienced by adjunct faculty. The opportunity to learn more about best supportive practices will benefit adjunct faculty and improve the online student learning experience. Adjunct faculty must be effectively supported to develop impactful teaching practices to avoid adverse student outcomes (Butters & Gann, 2022).

Faculty self-identifying as adjuncts report myriad issues, including limited time to prepare and teach courses, difficulties navigating online learning management systems, and limited contact with other online adjunct faculty (Butters & Gann, 2022). While the challenges can be easily identified, positive factors also exist. In recent research conducted at the University of Phoenix, adjunct faculty were found to have low levels of feelings of depersonalization, organizational cynicism, and emotional exhaustion while reporting high levels of personal accomplishment (Reed et al., 2023).

Despite the trend of institutions shifting toward adjunct faculty to fill staffing needs and support new programs, researchers have reported several challenges adjunct faculty face. These challenges ultimately negatively impact institutional effectiveness. The literature review revealed at least three factors that contribute to adjunct faculty dissatisfaction.

The first factor involves compensation and job security. According to Parsons et al. (2021), adjunct faculty are hired into lower-paid roles that need more job security, benefits, or dignity given to full-time faculty. Parsons et al. (2021) assert the need to improve the working conditions of adjunct faculty by including professional support to preserve institutional effectiveness. The second factor is a lack of connection to the institution or a sense of not belonging. Despite the increased use of adjunct faculty, there are perceptions that some adjunct faculty are the academic underclass of professionals hired into temporary roles (Parsons et al., 2021; Swann et al., 2021). The third factor is the need for more professional development support. According to Purdam and Evans (2024), the lack of professional

support and improvement in administrative policies could decrease commitment to the overarching institutional goals, decreasing student outcomes.

The current research aims to understand the perspectives of university leaders and employees who support adjunct faculty. By understanding the effect of policies, procedures, and university personnel's actions, a better understanding of the challenges of adjunct faculty may be garnered. While quantitative research has been conducted, the impact of using multiple perspectives offers a comprehensive understanding of faculty experiences.

Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is the Communities of Practice (CoP). The premise of CoP is the prevalence of collaborative learning shared by individuals who share not only a community but also common interests, goals, and expertise (Wenger, 1998). For adjunct faculty, forming these communities allows the creation of spaces to share experiences and develop a collective identity (Wenger et al., 2002). The CoP framework emphasizes professional development and continuing learning (Wenger-Traynor & Wegner-Traynor, 2015). The framework can be expanded for online adjunct faculty to include Virtual Communities of Practice (VCoP), highlighting the value of community created through online forums, virtual meetings, and other technologically centered events (Beres & Janes, 2022). This study uses the CoP conceptual framework by integrating it into the questions being asked in the open-ended surveys. The questions focus on individual and organizational perspectives, emphasizing professional development, continuous improvement, and learning.

Literature Review

Higher education universities face decreased enrollment, with potential new student enrollment decreasing by as much as 1-2% per year (Copley & Douthett, 2015). In addition to the effects of decreasing enrollments, online universities will also need to contend with multiple other issues. Rising tuition costs and concerns about personal debt need to be balanced with the value of personal development and employability (Hollister et al., 2022). Online education will continue to face scrutiny based on perceived

rigor and value (Adcock, 2023). The challenges faced by online universities may be mitigated by the role of adjunct faculty in delivering high-quality, innovative programs (Bollinger, 2012). The value of faculty in delivering these programs is the inclusion of the practical experience brought into the classroom by adjunct faculty. Including practical knowledge allows a more effective connection between students and online adjunct faculty (Mushtata et al., 2022).

Educational Leadership

Online education leadership will also protect online universities from decreasing enrollment. Effective leaders must develop clear and inventive strategic planning to support continued growth (Schellenberg, 2023). Much of the strategic growth plan will involve innovative teaching methods and technology. Prioritizing faculty quality and aligning initiatives with the university's mission and values will continue to be significant goals for university leadership (Barefield & Meyer, 2013). Effective leaders will understand the need to continuously inspire and empower their faculty to realize their goals (Barefield & Meyer, 2013).

Support Services

The quality and engagement of adjunct faculty may also stem the decrease in student enrollment. While adjunct faculty routinely accept lower pay levels than their full-time counterparts, they generally do not consider pay a deterrent to their desire to teach (Kelley & Kilburn, 2023). Online faculty can be more agile and cost-effective than full-time faculty, resulting in a steady increase in adjunct faculty employment (Sayyadi & Proviterra, 2022). With the increased employment of adjunct faculty, universities must provide support, communication, training, equity, and engagement to foster a sense of belonging for adjunct faculty (Layou et al., 2022).

Adjunct Faculty Needs

A review of the adjunct faculty literature revealed their needs and provided recommendations. The literature also covered strategies to overcome online faculty challenges, which provide adjunct faculty with greater relevance and belonging. Researchers suggest mutual effort is required from the adjunct faculty, leadership, and tenured faculty. For example, Layou et al. (2022) recommend that adjunct faculty become more familiar with the institutions' culture, mission, and vision. Additional recommendations included advocating for

oneself by building networks within the institution, participating in institutional societal committees, and participating in professional development where available. Institutional leadership and tenured faculty can also meet faculty needs by supporting faculty development through communications and training opportunities and providing adjunct faculty with a sense of equity and belonging through advocacy (Layou, 2022). Tarbutton and Swisher (2023) recommend that higher education organizations invest in developing and implementing systems to increase adjunct instructors' sense of belonging while inspiring a greater appreciation of institutional identity.

Research Questions

- R1. What are the college leaders' perceptions of online adjunct faculty support through the faculty support lifecycle (recruitment and onboarding, continuous employment support, and separation)?
- R2. What are the support services departments' perceptions of the support practices through the faculty support lifecycle (recruitment and onboarding, continuous employment support, and separation)?
- R3. What processes and policies are used for online adjunct faculty support through the faculty support lifecycle (recruitment and onboarding, continuous employment support, and separation)?
- R4. What are online adjunct faculty's perceptions of the support practices provided through the faculty support lifecycle (recruitment and onboarding, continuous employment support, and separation)?

Method and Design

An exploratory case study design is used because it is more appropriate to explore complex phenomena, such as the experiences of the support provided by university staff and adjunct faculty. Using an exploratory case study allows for the review of potential misalignments of current efforts and the opportunity to enhance communication and support (Acar et al., 2023). Open-ended surveys were used to gather perceptions of university staff and adjunct faculty. Archival data such as past engagement and student surveys and existing standard operating procedures and policies were used to triangulate the data gathered in the open-ended surveys.

Recruitment

The participants were recruited via email to request participation, provide informed consent, and include a link to the online questionnaire. Staff participants included administrative staff in the Faculty Engagement departments, curriculum development teams, college leaders, and online adjunct faculty. Faculty and college leader participants included representatives of all colleges. The questionnaire consists of open-ended questions.

Ethical Considerations

The research involves conducting a case study to explore the experiences and practices of an online higher education institution. In undertaking this study, it is imperative to address several ethical considerations to ensure the protection and well-being of participants, as well as the integrity of the research process and its representation. Firstly, informed consent was obtained from all participants. Clear information regarding the research purpose, procedures, potential risks, and benefits was provided to ensure participants could make voluntary and informed decisions about their involvement. Anonymity measures were rigorously implemented to safeguard participants' privacy and protect sensitive information. All responses were anonymous and stored in a password-protected environment. Institutional approvals from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and Committee on Research (COR) were sought to ensure compliance with ethical guidelines and standards, and regular ethical reflection and consultation were conducted to effectively address any emerging ethical issues.

Significance

In the dynamic realm of higher education, universities' success hinges on their students' achievements. Online adjunct faculty play a pivotal role in this equation, yet they meet many challenges, from burnout to role ambiguity. Online faculty experiences may include inadequate and ineffective preparation and development of effective online teaching skills (Butters & Gann, 2023). The research explored the intricate dynamics of the relationships and experiences of adjunct faculty through a comprehensive case study

approach. Identifying the perceived effectiveness of supportive best practices among online adjunct faculty and university leaders can help identify potential misalignments or gaps.

The exploration of nuanced patterns and themes using open-ended surveys and analysis of archived policies and data provided a robust review. By doing so, the research results may enhance teaching practices and improve student learning experiences. This research is poised to contribute to the field by informing best practices within online higher education, advancing theory, and enriching existing literature. Understanding the evolving landscape of online education involves identifying opportunities for growth and innovation, aligning initiatives with the institution's mission and values, and prioritizing quality assurance by establishing standards and guidelines for online course design, delivery, and assessment (Barefield & Meyer, 2013). By enhancing the effectiveness of online adjunct faculty, this study aspires to positively impact society at large by promoting better educational outcomes through continued improvement of online adjunct faculty engagement.

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Dr. Rheanna Reed has been in the higher education industry since 2006 and earned her Doctor of Management and Organizational Leadership in 2019. Dr. Reed holds the Faculty Quality Assurance Manager position at the University of Phoenix. In this role, she provides leadership and guidance to Faculty Quality Assurance Specialists, leveraging institutional best practices among faculty and disseminating effective teaching methods that support student success and enhance program quality. Alongside her leadership role, Dr. Reed has been an Associate Faculty member at the University of Phoenix since 2014. Dr. Reed is passionate about delivering quality education to enhance students' educational experiences.

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Transformative Research and Healthcare Education

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The intent of this article is to promote the incorporation of transformative learning principles in healthcare curriculums, enabling faculty and students to critically assess competing priorities (Malsia & Loku, 2024). Within this environment, learning occurs by merging new information with existing knowledge resulting in meaningful connections among concepts (Eyler, 2018). Educators, using such principles, promote an authentic relationship with learners (Cranton, 2019). Within this framework, faculty strive to foster openness, inclusivity, critical reflection, dialogue, and conversation (Gannon, 2020).

Transformative Research

Transformative research encourages the exploration of current beliefs and practices contributing to solving societal problems catalyzing processes of change. The approach has the potential to enhance the way one understands and addresses social problems (Mukhalaalati & Taylor, 2019). Ideas, discoveries, or tools to radically challenge one's understanding of existing concepts are promoted (Gadhoun, 2022). The impact of transformative research can be examined from multiple levels: individual (transform self); interpersonal/group (transform relationships, shared purpose, commitments; institutional, reformed curriculum and academic policies); structural (shift narratives and norms). At its core, transformative research is a process of intentionally and consciously taking in something from the world around us, and putting out something from inside us, like the cycle of

mindful breathing in and breathing out (Korhonen, et al, 2024).

Transformative Teaching

Transformational teaching, as an instructional/educational philosophy, was first conceptualized within the belief faculty may promote meaningful change in students' lives (Slavich, 2005). Functioning as intellectual coaches and change agents, they encourage collaboration among learners. Faculty promote a shared vision with learners as they model experiences, challenge students, provide personalized attention and feedback, create experiential lessons transcending the boundaries of the classroom, and promote ample opportunities for reflective experiences (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). Student-centered learning shifts the locus of knowledge acquisition from educators to learners, placing the responsibility of acquiring information and making sense of the information on students, with faculty acting as facilitators. In terms of knowledge, it changes from being possessed by lecturers to being socially constructed (Chen & Tsai, 2021). Engaging students as active learners encourages them to empathize with other persons.

Sufficient mastery of course content serves as a prerequisite for effective transformative teaching; transformations promote true internalization of theoretical concepts while encouraging positive personal change. Within this framework, learners are more than vessels for knowledge; faculty teach for

holism and understanding (Sternberg, 2008; Woodly, 2024). Faculty strive to create spaces promoting confidence, comfort, and psychological safety enabling students to learn and grow (Norell, 2024). Students synthesize new information into existing knowledge structures; the goal, however, is not simply to impart new information but to transform how students learn and live.

Transformative Learning

Transformational Learning Theory promotes critical reflection and rational discourse; learners are encouraged to develop mentally, socially, affectively, and ethically (Cabaniss, 2014). A transformative experience encourages a revision in one's beliefs and thought patterns (Mezirow, 2009). Faculty and learners invest their time and resources in achieving a common goal; they gain an understanding of one another. Ideally, the learner develops an open and accommodating view of the topic or world. This involves a fundamental change in perceptions; students critique their assumptions to understand if what they believe is accurate (Nestel, et al, 2020). Transformative learning aims to awaken students to issues of injustice, and to promote their critical analysis of assumptions, beliefs and values leading to and sustaining social inequities, so they may become agents of social change (McAllister, et al, 2013).

Transformative learning is rational and analytical; it facilitates a transition from transmissive learning to a transformative paradigm (Enkhtur & Yamamoto, 2017). Faculty enable learners to adjust their thinking based on new information (O'Shea, et al, 2022). Learners are supported in examining new perspectives, exploring their beliefs and thought patterns, and using critical reflection impacting the transformation of their world view. Students experience a mental shift; they achieve deeper understanding and a capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance (Kleinheksel, 2014; Rahman, et al, 2023).

Transformative learning theory suggests there are phases adult learners follow enabling them to examine prior notions; this process can be challenging and uncomfortable. Four phases of transformative learning include having experiences; making assumptions; challenging perspectives; and experiencing transformative learning; learning becomes a new experience (Nerstrom, 2014). Within

this framework, students are asked to develop new perspectives, explore new roles, and build self-efficacy. Faculty assist learners using meaningful, interactive, integrative activities. Students are encouraged, with the use of critical reflection and discourse, to modify their perspective enabling them to gain insight and question assumptions and expectations; they learn to think independently while, potentially, discarding knowledge acquired because of their life experiences (Morgan, et al, 2019).

Transformative Teaching in Healthcare Education

A gap and perceptual differences currently exist among healthcare providers, learning environments, and actual professional situations (Scibilia, 2020; Ungaro, et al, 2024). Employers, educators, stakeholders, and students are recognizing the need for transformational changes in healthcare education (Thibault, 2020). Factors driving healthcare transformation include fragmentation, access problems, unsustainable costs, suboptimal outcomes, and disparities. Cost and quality concerns, along with changing social and disease-type demographics, result in an urgency for the need for change (Salmond & Echevarria, 2017). Success lies in a healthcare organization's ability to create interactions placing patients and providers needs above those of administrators; the goal is to advance quality improvement, using innovative approaches, promoting patient-centered care. Transformation goes to the core of the organization; it is a pervasive, collective, institution-wide phenomenon. A transformative approach to healthcare education can help address health disparities, structural inequity, and diversity by providing a lens to understand these issues (Nygren, et al, 2023). Transformative learners are more reflective, develop inclusive thinking, are more open to differences of opinion, and become less judgmental about other issues they may encounter. Armed with these new ways of thinking, learners use new thoughts to guide action (Taylor & Mezirow, 2009).

A transformative process can be promoted by caring enthusiastic educators within a safe environment for learners enables them to share their personal perspectives (Rojo, et al, 2022). Experiential activities, such as collaborative project requirements, and the teacher's caring attitude and enthusiasm help learners

master concepts, enhance skills, and develop positive attitudes, values, and beliefs towards learning. Faculty should focus on nurturing learner engagement to keep them motivated and persist in the course (Vergara, 2022).

The task for faculty is to encourage dynamic relationships with learners while providing opportunities for them to reflect, in sophisticated ways, on their personal goals. The use of meaningful assignments advances consideration of personal biases and fallacies in logic or reasoning; students are asked to consider counterarguments and to offer alternate interpretations or explanations for specific situations. Faculty promote the use of abstract thinking enabling learners to formulate their own questions. Faculty and students reflect on current beliefs, values, and underlying assumptions about what the institution does, promotes, and how it functions. The objective is to encourage modification of existing ideas; both groups are motivated to ‘learn while transforming’ (Barth, 2014). Transformation occurs when a change is both deep and pervasive. Building on the students’ lived experiences, they begin to explore preconceived notions of health and the role of healthcare providers (Cornelius, 2019). Learning experiences are designed to challenge students’ sense of self and sense of belonging (Fineout-Overholt, et al, 2005).

Conclusion

Contemporary education demands varied teaching methods tailored to each student’s unique needs, ensuring effective, engaging, and relevant learning. Theoretical understanding and clinical skills alone are not sufficient to prepare students enrolled in healthcare education; they need to critically reflect on how their own values and attitudes influencing their professional practice. Transformative learning involves a fundamental questioning of one’s values and ideologies (Brookfield, 2000). Faculty use critical reflection to promote receptive listening, empathy, and social responsibility among learners. The process is triggered by uncomfortable challenges in one’s worldview stimulating expanded awareness. Students must be ready to engage in autonomous, self-directed, and reflective learning activities. Faculty should be ready to facilitate this transformative change (Tsimane & Downing, 2020). If students do not have time, space, or skills to integrate these experiences they may

disengage (Taylor, 2001).

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Innovative Use of Structured Psycho-Educational Groups to Teach Group Residency

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Abstract

This paper addresses the use of a structured psycho-educational group to teach residency. Students often face high anxiety during group work training. Structured psychoeducational groups alleviate anxiety, enhance self-awareness, self-efficacy, and facilitate learning. These groups target skill acquisition and prepare students for leading groups through outlined sessions. The Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs mandate counselor educators to integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum, enriching students' experiences as facilitators and group members. This paper offers a solution to meet these needs in teaching group residency and underscores the importance of considering multiculturalism in counselor education. We suggest implications for counselor education in the training of group workers as well as challenges and limitations.

Keywords: Psycho-educational groups, residency, group skills, anxiety, self-efficacy

Given students historically experience high anxiety at the onset of group work training (Markus & Abernethy, 2001), the structured psychoeducational group format assists in reducing anxiety, increasing self-awareness and self-efficacy while promoting

learning (Thompson et al., 2020). The structured psycho-educational curriculum targets proper foci for skill acquisition. The use of group outlines allows the students to prepare for leading groups in an academic setting. Faculty design session activities to simulate

the group's life cycle. Additionally, they give personal growth opportunities to students. Counselor educators infuse multiculturalism and diversity into the counselor education curriculum (ACA, 2014; McCarthy et al., 2022; NBCC, 2023). They weave diversity, equity, and inclusion into the curriculum as students move through the course both as a facilitator and a group member.

Structured Groups and Developmental Needs of Students

Competency in group work is a core training area for counselors-in-training (ACA, 2014; NBCC, 2023, McCarthy et al., 2022). CACREP (2024) dictates 10 hours of group work as part of the curriculum. Additionally, ACA (2014) mandates that counselor educators adhere to ethical principles while engaging trainees in personal growth experiences. A structured psycho-educational experience is an ideal format that provides students with a safe environment to enhance group skill competencies.

Counselors-in-training may experience anxiety that manifests as resistance to experiential learning (Markus & Abernethy, 2001). Leading groups can evoke intense feelings, particularly among inexperienced counselors. Novice counselors may feel anxious about their perceived lack of competence (Landreth & Berg, 1979), while others may harbor concerns about losing control of the group (Markus & Abernethy, 2001). It is, therefore, imperative that counselor educators engage students in activities appropriate for the educational setting. Structured psychoeducational groups provide a pre-determined curriculum that reduces stress while focusing on group theory and skill acquisition (Xiong & Lu, 2021).

This approach focuses on how to meet students where they are in their development. Emphasis is placed on how to provide a safe academic space for learning group leadership skills. Broaching (Day et al., 2020) initiates conversation among students from diverse backgrounds. This also includes recognizing power within the group and managing differences.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are identified through recognizing activities that support individualized counselor-in-training growth in obtaining skills in group work.

Preparing for the Group Experience

In a collaborative approach, students participate in preplanning sessions with their designated co-facilitators to prepare their psychoeducational outlines, which serve as the foundation for their in-person group residency. While these outlines provide a semi-structured framework and include instructions for activities, students are tasked with articulating how they will execute various aspects of the session. This includes setting up the session, managing transitions, explaining activity instructions, facilitating discussions, implementing process questions, and concluding the group appropriately. The session flow is carefully designed to progress starting with introductions and icebreakers, moving into the main processing of educational content or activities, and concluding with reflections and closure. The sessions are designed to build upon each other, fostering continuity and depth of learning. When students are facilitators, they are encouraged to remain attentive to the group's developmental stages, including initial engagement, forming connections, productive collaboration, and ultimately, termination or closure, ensuring that the group experience is tailored to meet the evolving needs of its members.

Activities

The following is an abbreviated overview of the structured activities used in an in-person group residency. The stages of group development (Tuckman, 1965) are outlined along with a synopsis of the activities. The groups infuse DEI into the curriculum as they progress.

The Initial Stage

Tuckman (1965) characterizes the initial stage of development by the forming of the group. The atmosphere is typically marked by uncertainty, anxiety, and a desire for acceptance. Group members may be cautious and hesitant as they navigate unfamiliar social dynamics and establish their roles within the group. At this stage, readiness for addressing DEI is low among group members (Day et al., 2020). Therefore, while the initial stage provides opportunities for laying the groundwork for DEI discussions through establishing norms of respect and openness, group facilitators should be mindful of the

varying readiness levels and proceed with sensitivity and inclusivity. It's essential to create a supportive atmosphere where all members feel valued and heard, gradually introducing DEI topics as the group progresses through subsequent stages of development.

The “No Questions About It” group counseling curriculum activity serves as an icebreaker to foster deeper connections among group members (Tuckman, 1965). Participants are divided into dyads and are tasked with introducing themselves without using questions to gather information. This activity encourages active listening and communication skills while allowing individuals to share personal details. After the allotted time, the group reconvenes, and each participant introduces their dyad partner, facilitating further interaction and familiarity within the group. This activity promotes a sense of belonging and establishes a foundation for trust and collaboration among group members.

The Transition Stage

Conflict is the hallmark of the transition stage with members presenting with a sense of anxiety (Tuckman, 1965). Group members attempt to establish rapport and to feel more comfortable expressing themselves within the group. There is a heightened sense of engagement and commitment as individuals become more invested in the group's goals and processes. At this stage, readiness for DEI may vary among group members (Day et al., 2020). Some individuals are more receptive to exploring DEI topics, recognize the importance of understanding diverse perspectives and foster inclusivity within the group. Others may be hesitant or cautious, preferring to maintain focus on building relationships before delving into sensitive subjects. Therefore, while the transition stage provides opportunities for deeper exploration of DEI issues as trust and cohesion develop, facilitators should remain attuned to the readiness level of group members and approach DEI discussions with sensitivity and inclusivity, ensuring that all voices are heard and respected.

In the transitions stage, facilitators conduct an activity called “Your Place in the Group.” Leaders provide participants with paper and markers to create two drawings, one on each side of the paper, large enough for the group to see. Facilitators instruct members to illustrate their perception of themselves in relation to the group on the first page and how they think the

group sees them on the second page. After completing both drawings, each participant shares their illustrations with the group. Facilitators encourage dialogue by asking meaningful questions and using skills like paraphrasing and open-ended questioning to ensure clarity and understanding during the presentations.

The Working Stage

During the working stage of group development, the atmosphere is marked by increased cohesion, trust, and productivity (Tuckman, 1965). Group members have established strong relationships and are actively collaborating toward their goals. There is a sense of mutual respect and understanding, with open communication and constructive feedback being the norm. At this stage, readiness for DEI is higher compared to earlier stages (Day et al., 2020). Group members are more likely to feel comfortable engaging in discussions about DEI topics, recognizing the value of diverse perspectives and experiences in achieving the group's objectives. They show greater receptivity to exploring issues related to identity, privilege, and social justice, and taking collective action to promote inclusivity within the group and broader community. Facilitators leverage the positive dynamics of the working stage to facilitate meaningful DEI dialogues, fostering a culture of respect, empathy, and empowerment among group members.

Despite the facilitator's best efforts in promoting a safe environment, some members may not be ready to engage in meaningful DEI discussions. Counselor educators can help students with group members at various levels of readiness to engage in open and honest conversation around diversity. First, members should never be forced to participate in group discussions if they do not feel safe. During the initial stage of development leaders should ensure that a norm was established that members have a right to pass or be off focus. Leaders should be mindful that although members may not be actively participating, growth and increased understanding can still occur. Second, leaders can engage the group in a discussion about the barriers to having sensitive conversation. This type of honest conversation allows members to voice their concerns and results in a reduction of anxiety around discussing sensitive topics.

In the activity, “How Diverse is Your Universe,” students explore the diversity within their personal

universe. Leaders provide each group member with a worksheet and markers. Members color code various representations of diversity in their lives (e.g., ethnicity, sexual orientation). At the end of the activity, everyone in the group shares their representation of the diversity in their lives. This activity allows for self-reflection and awareness of the diversity within members' experiences, fostering empathy and understanding as counselors in training.

The Termination Stage

During the termination stage of group development, the atmosphere is often bittersweet, characterized by a mix of nostalgia, accomplishment, and apprehension about the impending separation (Tuckman, 1965). Group members have formed strong bonds and achieved shared goals, leading to a sense of pride and satisfaction in their collective accomplishments. However, there may also be feelings of sadness as individuals anticipate the end of their time together. Members may be more inclined to reflect on the diverse perspectives and experiences shared throughout the group process, recognizing the importance of DEI principles in fostering collaboration and understanding. Other members may focus on tying up loose ends and saying goodbye, prioritizing closure over DEI discussions. Facilitators can capitalize on the reflective nature of the termination stage to encourage group members to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity within the group, highlighting the ways in which DEI principles have enriched their collective experience. By fostering meaningful conversations about DEI during this stage, facilitators can help ensure that the lessons learned, and connections forged continue to resonate with group members beyond the conclusion of the group.

In the activity "Who Would You Take," students engage in a reflection exercise designed to recognize and appreciate the strengths of the fellow group members. After reading each scenario aloud such as "who would you take with you to Area 51?" They take a moment to consider who in the group would be best suited for the situation described. The group focuses on positive attributes and qualities of each group member as they make their selections. This exercise encourages empathy, observation, and recognition of the diverse talents and characteristics within the group, enhancing counseling skills as members learn to appreciate and utilize the strengths of their peers.

Challenges and Limitations

Implementing structured psychoeducational groups presents challenges that can impact their effectiveness. One major issue is managing diverse group dynamics, where varying participant needs, backgrounds, and learning styles can create uneven engagement and complicate facilitation. Facilitators must navigate these dynamics while ensuring that all members feel included and heard. Additionally, cultural sensitivity of the facilitator is crucial; group content and methods must be adapted to respect and reflect participants' cultural contexts. The effectiveness of the psychoeducational group heavily relies on the facilitator's expertise and experience, and a lack of skilled facilitators can undermine the process. Counselor educators play a key role in providing adequate supervision to assist students in utilizing relevant group skills to promote respectful DEI discussions. Addressing these limitations requires thoughtful planning, skilled facilitation, and ongoing adaptation to meet the diverse needs of participants effectively.

Conclusion

The activities and stages of group development outlined have implications for counselor educators. Recognizing and addressing counselors'-in-training anxiety in experiential learning contexts is essential. Counselor educators must emphasize meeting students at their developmental stage and creating a safe academic space for learning group leadership skills. By adopting a comprehensive approach that infuses DEI principles throughout the group counseling curriculum, educators can effectively prepare counselors-in-training to address diverse needs and foster inclusivity in their future practice.

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Revolutionizing Alternative Education: The Collaborative Story of RISE Academy

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RISE ACADEMY
WE RISE TOGETHER, WE RISE ABOVE

Abstract

School districts nationwide are seeking innovative methods to serve students in alternative educational settings. In South Carolina, two school districts have partnered to revolutionize alternative education, leading to the creation of Rise Academy in Dorchester School District Two. This collaboration has produced a successful program and exemplifies the power of purposeful collaboration between school districts. Rise Academy demonstrates how strategic partnerships can effectively address diverse student needs, setting a model for other districts to follow. This initiative highlights the importance of innovative and collaborative approaches in providing comprehensive educational opportunities for all students. Rise Academy's motto is We Rise Above, We Rise Together and is fitting considering the collaboration that helped start this successful program.

Alternative education is not a new concept in the educational history of the United States as state legislatures have embraced a variety of alternative designs for more than a century. As the needs of public schools have changed to address the ever growing demands and needs of society, so have public schools. Governor Schools and magnet schools are prime examples that most school communities wouldn't think of as alternative schools. Most school families think of alternative schools as those that serve a special population like students with disabilities, students with attendance and behavior concerns (Reimer & Cash, 2003). Most alternative schools have a negative connotation in most communities, but at its core, alternative education is more than a program, it's a perspective. It's important for school leaders to understand that not all students learn the same way, and an innovative approach to learning coupled with a positive school culture can change how we view the traditional alternative school (Reimer & Cash, 2003).

In the dynamic landscape of education, innovation shines brightest when districts come together to reimagine the learning environment. The inception of RISE Academy – a reimaged path of alternative education was co-crafted by two school districts in South Carolina: Dorchester School District Two and Horry County School District.

There is great potential for school-to-school collaboration, and when these collaborative approaches are implemented with fidelity, great success can be noted. The concept of school improvement through collegial collaboration is powerful and a concept that few would argue against, but there are pitfalls and challenges schools must overcome (Armstrong, Brown & Chapman, 2021). In 2022, Dorchester School District Two embarked on a collaborative journey: to redefine their approach to alternative education. Overcoming the challenges of collaboration, communication, and commitment to meaningful dialog and planning, was the priority

of leadership. Ensuring that all stakeholders were brought into the process ensured the success of the collaboration. To embark on this exciting journey, the districts arranged multiple site tours, structured peer-to-peer collaboration, and strategic partnerships. Out of this collaboration, RISE Academy was brought to life. Modeled after the beacon of alternative education, SOAR Academy, this innovative academy stands as a testament to the power of multi-district collaboration. At the heart of RISE Academy is a point system, a tiered approach, behavioral support, and service learning.

both academically and socially. Successful alternative schools provide at-risk students a greater opportunity to avoid academic and social failure resulting in a decrease chance of a student dropping out of school (Fuller & Sabatino, 1996). With this concept in mind, when a student is assigned to RISE Academy, the principal arranges an orientation meeting with the student and their family. Considering the nature of the student’s infraction that led to their placement in an alternative setting, as well as the orientation meeting itself, the principal designates the student into Tier 1, Tier 2, or Tier 3. Tier 3 represents the most restrictive level, wherein students remain confined to a single classroom for the entire school day until they progress to Tier 2 and subsequently Tier 1. Within each tier, students are required to accumulate 100 points based on their academic achievements and behavior. Additionally, they are expected to complete 20 hours of community service. As a student successfully advances out of Tier 1, they “Rise” from RISE Academy and reintegrate into their original home school. To commemorate this achievement, a weekly RISE ceremony is conducted every Friday. During this event, teachers, families, and students gather to celebrate those students who are making strides toward returning to their base school. Because of the careful planning, collaboration, and implementation of the tier system, hope has been restored for students assigned to RISE Academy. Students are no longer sentenced to the program for the remainder of the year, and each student has personal goals to return to their home school.

A majority of students in alternative schools have faced challenges leading to their struggles within their original home schools. Often, the home schools lack the necessary interventions and support systems to effectively address the root causes behind the poor decision-making of the most at-risk students. Student enrollment in alternative programs is fluid as students are removed and returned to their home schools on a frequent basis. The goal of most alternative programs is to return students to their home schools as soon as students are prepared to do so (Kleiner et al., 2002). At RISE Academy, the primary focus is on tackling behavioral issues through intensive support systems. A key determining factor of whether a student will successfully complete an alternative program and transfer back to their home school may depend on the quality of the education and services students receive (Kleiner et al., 2002). A key aspect to this approach,

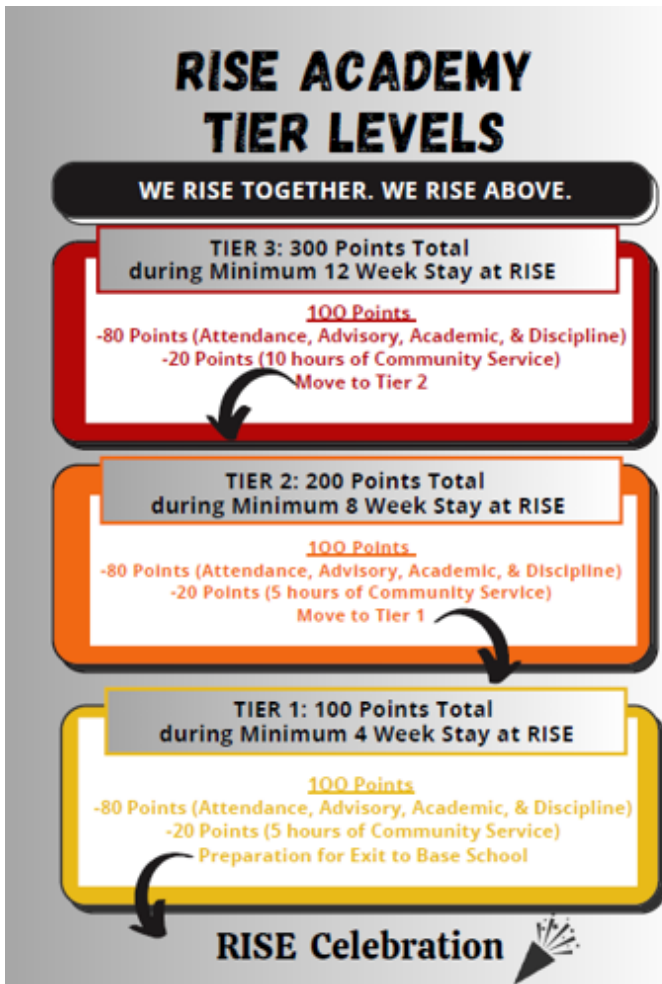


FIGURE 1 | RISE Academy tier levels.

The concept of students earning points as they progress through a tier system was the driving force behind the changes implemented in Dorchester School District Two. Prior to the current school year, students were assigned to the alternative program for the remainder of the academic year, which many students saw as a “life-sentence” with no hope of returning to their home school. As students lost hope in the system, their chances of falling farther behind was evident

students are mandated to participate in counseling sessions on a weekly basis during their enrollment at the academy. School counselors working in alternative schools perform different duties than their counterparts in traditional schools. Alternative school counselors focus greater attention on credit recovery to ensure academic success. A great deal of attention is given to teaching soft skills and motivating students by supporting the individual needs of students (Shaw, 2021). Developing social and emotional skills benefit students both academically and emotionally. With this intense counseling focus, students are equipped with skills to problem solve, communicate, and build positive relationships, all skills that increase the likelihood of students graduating high school. At Rise Academy, the frequency of counseling attendance varies based on the student's designated tier. Those in Tier 3, deemed the most at-risk, are required to engage in daily counseling sessions. Conversely, students in Tier 1 might only need to attend counseling weekly, contingent on the specific nature of the infraction that led them to RISE. It's important to note that the successful completion of these counseling sessions is a prerequisite for students to accumulate points necessary for advancing to the next tier level, ultimately facilitating their return to their base school.

Service learning plays such an important part of the curriculum, contributing to the community through service learning holds a significant role in fostering restorative behavior at RISE Academy. Service learning is important for students to be involved with because they become involved in something important where they can make a difference in their communities (Meyers, 2010). Typically, students in an alternative school have struggled to find academic and social

success throughout their educational journey leading to many undesirable behaviors. When students are able to connect to a community member, or service project in a positive way, it gives them a taste of success that has been evasive for students to obtain. As previously mentioned, the entire framework at RISE is structured around a student's tier assignment, and this principle extends to the required service learning hours in each tier. Across all tiers, students are mandated to complete 20 hours of service learning to progress to the subsequent tier level. To facilitate this, students are connected with community partners who are enthusiastic about collaborating with them. Alternatively, students have the autonomy to select an organization where they would like to carry out their community service. On alternating Fridays, an opportunity is provided for RISE Academy students to fulfill their service learning commitment while also gaining valuable Work-Based Learning (WBL) experiences. These experiences involve engagement in organized learning activities with leaders from the local business community, facilitated by the school. The underlying objective is that by involving students with nearby businesses, they will come across job prospects that kindle academic inspiration in school. Research suggests that when learners connect with real people in real industry leads to accomplishing tasks that are relevant to students. This connection to relevant learning working towards a potential paid employment opportunity for students can be life changing. Data shows that attitudes in general improved when students were involved in WBL opportunities when students were back in school (Allan, 2014). The Work-Based Learning experiences revolve around aligning students' interests with the



needs within the community. This “real-life” approach aims to benefit both students and the community, potentially creating a mutually advantageous partnership. Additional research suggests that students in alternative school settings prefer to remain in school when given the opportunity to participate in meaningful work-based learning experiences (Lewis, 2016). Not only does this ensure students stay on track for graduation, but it ensures students graduate with a skill to enter the workforce.

RISE Academy, a part of Dorchester School District Two, has instituted a transformative approach to student behavior and growth. Instead of simply transferring struggling students to an alternative setting, RISE employs a tiered system where students progress by earning points based on behavior and academics. Each tier comes with its own requirements and interventions. Intensive behavioral support, mandatory counseling sessions, and community service obligations are integral components of this system. Students are guided through Work-Based Learning experiences, fostering connections with local businesses and real-world opportunities. By bridging academics, behavior, and community engagement, RISE Academy aims to prepare students for a positive return to their base schools while empowering them with essential life skills.

About the Author

Dr. Greg Harrison currently serves as an Assistant Professor at The Citadel and an Associate Professor at University of Phoenix. Dr. Harrison served the Executive Director of Student Programs in Dorchester School District Two before assuming his current role.

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Supporting Workers, Women, and Wellness in the Post-Pandemic Workplace

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic was a major catalyst for workplace change. For many, remote work became routine while those considered essential workers found themselves on the frontlines of a war to save lives and meet critical needs. These heroic measures coupled with the challenges of life in a pandemic left many workers burned out, exhausted, and looking for answers. In addition, the pandemic exacerbated existing workplace woes and shifted leaders into crisis mode. This article examines recent studies and literature that answer the question: “How can leaders support the needs of today’s workers, especially women, post-pandemic?” Findings and recommendations address worker concerns and explain how intentional leadership can improve diversity and inclusion; promote employee health and wellness; and provide constructive feedback, mentorship, and advancement for women. Additionally, this article explores options for driving employee and leader engagement through effective leadership practices.

The healthcare industry experienced one of its greatest challenges - a worldwide pandemic that caused the death of more than seven million people and greater than one million Americans (World Health Organization, 2024). During the Covid-19 crisis, healthcare workers took life threatening risks to save lives. These heroic measures coupled with the challenges of daily life in a pandemic left many workers burned out, exhausted, and looking to

leadership for answers (Koren, et al., 2023). In addition to the pandemic’s misery, the nation saw fatal police actions that resulted in the deaths of Mr. George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota and Ms. Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky. These horrific tragedies focused the country on rectifying social injustices through diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. This article discusses worker’s concerns and reviews studies and literature that address the question: “How can leaders

support the needs of today’s workers, especially women, post-pandemic?”

Worker Concerns

Conduct a literature search on post-pandemic worker needs or ask a worker what they are looking for in today’s workplace and they will likely reply a “seat at the table” and a voice in the decisions that affect them. Closely behind will be effective worker-focused leadership, open communications, compassion, health, and wellness. Women will likely mention the need for inclusion, more career opportunities, more women in leadership, constructive feedback, and affirmation of their work (Wheeler, 2023).

Catalyst for Change

In many industries, the pandemic served as a catalyst for change with the transition to remote work, virtual classes, and self-service expansion. Though some healthcare support roles went remote, those in patient care found themselves on the front line in a war against the virus (Koren, et al., 2023). In addition, the pandemic exacerbated many of health care’s existing woes and forced leaders into crisis management with little time for effective, responsive, engaged, and worker focused leadership (Mehle, 2022).

Literature Review

Discrimination in the Workplace

Both men and women can encounter discrimination in the workplace. According to Gonzales (2022) that perceived gender discrimination reduces the sense of belonging and erodes collegiality and collaboration in the workplace for both sexes. However, the study shows that gender discrimination decreases self-efficacy in women but not in men. To mitigate the impact on workers who express concerns about discrimination, leaders and human resources professionals should actively listen to employees who feel they have experienced discrimination. Workers should be able to express their issues and feelings confidentially without retaliation. An open and transparent approach increases integrity, respect, and trust while promoting a diverse workplace where everyone can thrive (Gonzales, 2022).

Women and the Workplace

Leaders often wonder why women’s perspectives

and experiences are so different from their male counterparts when they attend the same meetings, work on the same projects, and go after the same promotions. According to Waller (2016) the similarities end there with women seeing more barriers and a steeper climb to the top. Men are thirty percent more likely to be promoted into management. Though forty-six percent of entry level positions are held by women, the numbers drop dramatically from there with women being thirty-seven percent of managers, thirty-three percent of directors, twenty-nine percent of vice presidents, twenty-four percent of senior vice presidents, and nineteen percent of chief officers (McKinsey, 2022).

Opportunities for Women

Some of the largest issues for women are receiving fewer “stretch” assignments, less training, and fewer development opportunities than their male counterparts. Other key findings are that men get much more constructive feedback as well as more access and interaction with senior leaders and executives. These interactions are key to building and accessing career advancement. Women need access to mentors who can provide career advice and direction in dealing with gender differences in the workplace. Examples given are how to push for a promotion, not be sidelined or treated differently, and how to address discriminatory behavior head on. Women should also seek access, visibility, and career recommendations from senior executives (McKinsey, 2022; Waller, 2016).

Women’s Priorities

McKinsey & Company surveys working women annually. The survey looks at what is needed to make meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality as well as develop and retain women in the workplace. This broad and diverse study gives an intersectional look at biases and barriers as well as what is increasingly important to working women such as: flexibility, well-being, diversity, equity, and inclusion. The 2022 report concluded that women are happier, less burned out, and less likely to consider leaving their jobs when managers support employee well-being and prioritize diversity equity, and inclusion (McKinsey, 2022).

Self-Efficacy and Confidence

Isaac et al. (2012) focuses on women as leaders and presents discussion on the ways that women’s

careers and self-efficacy are affected by the conscious and sub-conscious actions of leaders and others. Research clearly shows that women experience slower career advancement and higher attrition at all career stages as well as underrepresentation in leadership roles. Reasons include barriers and stereotypes women experience early in their careers and how these experiences affect a woman's own self-efficacy, confidence, and career decisions. Impacts on women include a lack of support for career advancement, negative expectations, and assignment to "institutional housekeeping" type roles. These roles are seen as service in nature, less visible, unrelated to organizational goals, and do not lead to career advancement. The article and associated study suggest that educational offerings designed to prepare women for leadership and build their self-efficacy positively self-confidence and career advancement (Isaac, et al., 2012).

Effective Feedback

Doldor et al. (2021) finds that even positive feedback provided to women in the workplace tends to be less actionable for career and leadership progression than feedback given to male colleagues. The lack of constructive feedback makes it less likely that women will advance to senior positions. Feedback needs to be constructive and focus on skills and career development. A key area where research found that feedback consistently differs between genders is in building confidence. Men were instructed on developing specific skills such as meeting management and communications with senior executives while women were given generic advice to simply "build self-confidence" without specific directions. Research also shows that hiring executives often cite lack of confidence as their justification for not promoting women into management. Leaders should focus on supplying specific and actionable feedback consistently regardless of gender (Doldor et al., 2021).

Workplace Stress

Overall health and wellness are another area of concern for today's workers. One study demonstrates the impact of work on the lives and health of employees. Believed to be the first study to make such a connection, researchers at the University of Louisville showed a link between workplace culture and human health. The study connects bio

markers for chronic disease to workplace stress and meaningfulness of work. The study, conducted in 2019, asks participants about their well-being, work engagement, and positive/negative feelings about work. The survey results were compared to biological samples that measure stress hormones. The study showed a direct correlation between employee's attitude toward their work and their health status. Those reporting having positive engagement and good health had lower stress hormones while those reporting negative feelings toward their work and poor well-being had higher stress hormones. Conclusions made were that lesser amounts of stress can help work performance, but constant stress can affect health and increase risk for chronic conditions. Understanding cultural and work-related factors can improve employee health and engagement as well as create better work environments and staff retention (MD Update Staff, 2022).

Worker Wellness

Gooch (2022) interviewed Cleveland Clinic's Dr. Kelly Hancock about the impact of the Covid-19 crisis on the health system's employees. Dr. Hancock, the organization's first chief care-giving officer, discussed the goal of offering an environment where workers want to be. Hancock shared how system leaders served as role models for wellness by taking time off, meditating, and prioritizing midday walks. Leaders routinely conducted staff check-ins and group discussions that identify and get ahead of burnout and disengagement. Recognizing employees for their contributions and the work they do was found to be one of the most important drivers of employee well-being, engagement, and retention. Hancock recommends listening to employees through formal surveys, informal meetings, and leadership rounding. She concluded that leaders must give employees their full attention, be present, and understand worker needs (Gooch, 2022).

Transformational Leadership

Liyanage (2020) conducted a study on transformational leadership by systemically reviewing, analyzing, and synthesizing thirty different studies. Most all studies agreed that transformational leaders function as a buffer for employees against work demands by providing support and coaching. This leadership support improves the employee's coping ability, helps the employee manage their own conflicts,

and contributes to a state of worker well-being (Liyanage, 2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

All selected literature was found to provide meaningful practices and impactful ways for leaders to support workers and improve the lives, wellness, and careers of women. Best practices and recommendations include that both male and female leaders must ensure that all employees are afforded the same leadership support, opportunities, constructive feedback, and mentoring (Doldor et al., 2021). Leaders need to be fair, flexible, and intentional in providing clear and constructive performance feedback and career advancement opportunities (Waller, 2016). Other recommendations are the development of educational and mentoring programs as well as employee health and wellness efforts that are sustaining and not one-day or one-time occurrences (Isaac, et al., 2012; MD Update, 2022). These efforts need to be part of the organization's vision and goals as well as part of leadership's responsibilities (Gooch, 2022). Progress should be monitored and regularly reported to executive leadership and the organization's board of directors. Actions taken and outcomes achieved should be transparent and shared with employees and stakeholders. Transformational leadership, intentional efforts, and transparent accountability create positive workplaces that promote and support health, wellness, and success for all workers (Liyanage, 2020).

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Jackie Lucas's experience includes senior executive positions in enterprise health systems; Fortune 15 advisory board member for McKesson and AT&T; Wall Street Journal CIO Contributor; Computerworld Premier 100 CIO Leader award winner; and speaking nationally on transformation, diversity, inclusion, and post-pandemic leadership.

Ms. Lucas joined the University of Phoenix faculty in 2004, the College of Health Professions in 2014, and became a Core Instructor in 2022. Ms. Lucas holds an MBA from the University of Memphis, an MFA from Belmont University, and is currently working on a PhD in Leadership and Business with ABD expected in early 2025.

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Realizing Resilience Goals for African American Males in High School



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Abstract

With the focus on providing practical applications, this research examined the perceptions and experiences of teachers, mentors, and curriculum coaches who worked with African American male high school students. The data collected consisted of curriculum methods, academic and social interventions, and strategies used by teachers, mentors, and curriculum coaches when working with the African American student population. The recommendations are significant in contributing positive changes or approaches to the knowledge on best practices to increase the persistence rate of African American males to graduate high school, which is impactful in life and student success.

Introduction

There is an increasing importance to provide practices, innovative initiatives, and strategies to support student retention. Specifically, the problem addressed in this research focused on the lack of academic and social interventions that impact the persistence of African American male students to graduate high school (Jackson et al., 2020). Even though some African American male students are motivated to persist through high school and reach their goals, others were sometimes viewed as bad influences in the school setting (Jackson et al., 2020). The school environment may have impacted

the success or lack thereof for African American male students to continue in high school because of stereotypes that projected a negative image on the academic success (Herzog, 2018; Tinto, 1982).

Awareness of additional factors is important to consider. African American male students seem to have been undermined and seen as violent, which may have created barriers to their academic success (Marrero & Milacci, 2018). Another important consideration consisted of socio-economic and social-emotional issues that could be addressed in academic and social interventions to increase the persistence of this vulnerable population.

Building on positive persistence factors is an area for further focus. For instance, Marrero and Milacci (2018) highlighted how academic success helped students to be engaged and supported in their classwork, which built persistence. Accordingly, pursuing academic success was related to motivation and persistence to strive for excellence in the school system (Tinto, 2005). Obtaining additional insight about the extent to which persistence is a key contributor for African American male students graduating from high school (Linnenbrink-Garcia et al., 2018) may help to inform strategies focused on reducing the academic achievement gap for this group and additional learners who do not tend to persist to graduation.

Relevant Research and Framework

To contribute to identifying intervention opportunities, this study examined the perceptions and experiences of teachers, mentors, and curriculum coaches who worked with African American male high school students. The data collected consisted of curriculum methods, academic and social interventions, and strategies used by teachers, mentors, and curriculum coaches when working with the African American student population.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Ogbu's Theory of Oppositional Cultural Hypothesis (2003) and Tinto's (1982) persistence theory. In the United States, racism toward African Americans has created a subculture known as African American culture (Ogbu, 2003). This kind of thinking was characterized by Ogbu (2003) as having an oppositional culture identification. High school experiences for African American male students were influenced by personal values, experiences, and viewpoints. Because of errors, misconceptions, and a lack of supervision, African American male students tend to fail in school, particularly in secondary education (Middleton, 2020).

Understanding the role of mentorship is important. Ogbu's (2003) study conducted after six weeks of progressive mentorship found there were positive changes in student behaviors that were attributed to school mentoring (Ferguson, 2018). Mentor influence also projected changes in students' interpersonal skills and self-esteem, which in turn reduced school dropout rates. Thus, mentors influenced student behavioral improvement. Based on this outcome, one can infer

that it was the mentor's involvement, not simply exposure to the curriculum, that best accounted for changes in student self-esteem, self-management, and social skills. Specific to self-esteem, which is described as a general assessment of one's worth and significance, growth is experienced progressively during childhood and teenage years and solidifies in early adulthood (Ferguson, 2018).

Exploring the role of other factors offer important insight. For instance, social risk determinants were demographically linked to a heightened possibility of academic challenges and, as a result, increased dropout rates (Ferguson, 2018). Race, age, gender, family income, parents' level of education, and family structure were among the demographic attributes resulting in academic challenges. Students from racial and ethnic minority groups, as well as those with low socioeconomic status, who came from a single-parent household, or whose guardians did not finish high school, dropped out at disproportionate rates than White students (Ferguson, 2018). More specifically, the dropout rate for 16- to 21-year-old students who have not received a high school diploma was 5.1% for White students, 8% for African American students, 15.1% for Hispanic students, and 4.2% for Asian students in 2019 (Ferguson, 2018).

Persistence shapes the identity of students and aids them in reaching their goals. Tinto's (2005) persistence theory provides the infrastructure that assists one to understand the essential need for academic persistence. The literature shows the normative factors and the influence of persistence on behavior change among students (Tinto, 2005). Tinto explains the impetus of using motivational and normative factors to model techniques that will aid in student persistence. Tinto's theory supports the notion that persistence in academics helps students to overcome stress and transition in school.

Exploring the theory at the high school level provides pertinent guidance. Tinto's (1982) persistence theory explained the process that students go through and the role that high school had in enabling students to persist to graduation. Persistence theory required one to assess what the school can do to improve graduation rates. Students could persist and achieve academic success in high school with the help of teachers, mentors, and curriculum coaches. The main difference between these perspectives was the term and how students perceived information that

could be used to build motivation. Students must want to pursue and achieve a high school diploma by putting in effort. Student engagement was important to how the student reacted to class work for academic success, which decreased negative influences (Tinto, 2012). With a warm environment in which to learn, students felt safe knowing they have the support necessary to increase persistence and build academic success. Relationships and trust brought purpose to the lives of students who thought they had no support (Zengin, 2021). Accordingly, the relevant research and framework for the study contributed to addressing the problem regarding the lack of academic and social interventions impacting the persistence to high school graduation of African American male students.

Data Analysis

Prior to the data collecting and analysis, ethical considerations were applied. After IRB approval, an informed consent was completed providing participants with details about the study and the option to withdrawal at any time. Confidentiality was maintained using coding for participant identities including P1 through P10, member checking was conducted, and a secure storage was used for the data documentation.

An open coding method was used to analyze the data collected. Coding is the process of breaking down information into parts that are relevant to the research (Yin, 2018). Data were organized into categories, which were then labeled with a word that was frequently used based on the actual language of the participant. The information was grouped into themes and then classified based on the grouping of the topics.

Organizing the data gathered from the questionnaire and phone interviews into common categories and codes was necessary to evaluate the relevance to the qualitative exploratory case study. These data sets were interpreted in two different ways within the study and the context of the problem. The first step was to analyze the questionnaire data by the responses and separate the differences. Following each questionnaire, the data were categorized using a code number to represent the participants (Yin, 2018). The data were analyzed and interpreted using this interactive process. Next, the data analysis of the phone interview occurred after the recordings were

transcribed and checked to confirm trustworthiness and accuracy.

Data checks were implemented to ensure credibility. The researcher summarized the data findings of each participant, which enabled trustworthiness and credibility. All the data was collected and analyzed through Quirkos®. Participant data were imported into the Quirkos® program wherein essential keywords and themes were sorted for analysis. The emergent themes were grouped which allowed the researcher to triangulate the data to align with the research questions.

Triangulation is a foundational method that is used for trustworthiness. In qualitative research, triangulation shows consistency in the methods, data, and conceptual framework (Allen, 2017). With different sources, triangulation includes a comparison process demonstrating data credibility. The triangulation process focused on the corroboration of the different sources that align with the findings.

Emergent themes were identified among the data collected and the results of each response or phrase labeled. When the same word or phrase was repeated, a number was assigned. The questionnaires and phone interview transcripts remained coded until the study was completed. The documentation review was completed by reviewing articles and gathering information based on African American males who persist in high school and graduate.

Findings

The themes that emerged from included: (1) Harness Student Interest, (2) Academic Support Building, and (3) Intervention for Student Learning. For the first theme focused on overcoming educational challenges to persist, maintaining a positive attitude towards their studies and willingness to learn were the top two traits noted. The second theme emphasized the role of student support at home, in school, and outside of school to success. Overall, respondents shared that students have positive changes toward school due to external support, including a more positive attitude, eagerness to be successful, and feeling supported when facing academic challenges. In the third theme, respondents described the advice they would give to students who wanted to persist in education and graduate. The guidance including providing information about the opportunities available to those

with a high school diploma, encouraging students to stay focused on their goals, embrace curiosity, hard work, and the importance of personal happiness.

Recommendations to Support African American Male Students to Persist

African American male students' persistence to remain in school resulted from the support of institution staff and family members. Having a supportive educational environment helped students to know that even if failure occurred, support was there to bridge the gap. Harper and Berhanu (2015) showed that support helped to bring a positive attitude and build a firm foundation. Harper and Berhanu (2015) recommended implementing a curriculum that helped with academic and social interventions and academic success to help African American male students persist. They further indicated that these types of curricula enhanced motivation and inspired the students to review their work and take the initiative to push forward.

Multiple levels of support are another recommendation. According to Smith and Harper (2016), when schools invest in students, they become high achievers, and their grades increase. The support of teachers and family contributes to a positive experience in the school. The research also identified professional development opportunities that targeted the varied learning needs of African American male high students (Sanders et al., 2018). African American male students in high school have shown academic persistence due to the academic support of successful educators who gave them tools, such as professional development training that aligned with classroom materials (Harper & Smith, 2018).

Establishing expectations to encourage embracing educational challenges is also recommended. Teachers set the expectation that students should have academic potential and a desire to graduate (Allen, 2015). Setting high expectations may encourage students to follow and support the growth mindset for success in finishing school and graduating (Dweck, 2006). Even though challenges may arise in high school, persistence and high expectations may aid students in excelling and having a connection to learning.

In further fostering innovative practices and building on growth mindset development, teachers can support students by encouraging resilience skills. Teaching resilience is impactful in helping African American male student skills to overcome obstacles or fears while also embracing lessons learned about failure. Using resilience skills also offer opportunities to encourage actions including risk taking and growth from failure. For instance, applying the Mason Resilience Model allows teachers to integrate tools focusing on positive emotions, social support, meaning in life, copying, and physical well-being (White, 2022). Ultimately, the recommendations are significant in contributing positive changes and approaches to the knowledge on best practices to increase the persistence rate of African American males to graduate high school, which is impactful in life and student success.

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Dr. Zenovia Braham is honored to serve as an adjunct professor this academic year and has work in the school system for eighteen years as an assistant principal at Ace Academy for six years, as a principal for 3 years, and as a middle school teacher for seven years at Campbell Drive Elementary. She serves as an adjunct instructor (online) at South Florida Bible College. Dr. Braham graduated from Comprehensive High School, Jamaica, in 2000. She earned a Bachelor of Science (2013), Master of Psychology (2016), and Doctor of Education in Curriculum and Instructional Leadership from University of Phoenix (2023).

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Fostering Career-Readiness in Students and Graduates: Pioneering New Approaches that Create Real-World Impact

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Abstract

Research suggests employers recruit candidates who demonstrate aptitude in communication, critical thinking, leadership, teamwork, and self-directed learning. Higher education institutions can promote successful transition from college to career by connecting curriculum to careers, reinforcing messages about intentional career decision-making, and directing students to career service resources. Career fairs, internships, and interviews represent opportunities for students to demonstrate competencies, such as communication and critical thinking, to potential employers. This mixed method study describes insights from educators, current students, and career development professionals on improving graduates' career-readiness. The study pioneers new approaches that create real-world impact by enlisting faculty and others as career influencers to foster career-readiness in students and graduates.

Background

In the face of declining college enrollment rates (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2022), promoting graduate employability has survival value for higher education institutions as well as employers seeking workforce ready recruits (Kretschmann, 2024; Twyford & Dean, 2024). Alternatives to curriculum redesign include active learning, experiential opportunities, and hands-on components where students work with real-world problems and tackle interesting challenges (Gray, 2022; Green et al., 2023). Expanding the composition of career influencers to encompass educators, advisors, residential hall staff, new student orientation leaders, deans, registrar’s office staff and beyond (Stebleton & Ho, 2023) can facilitate the work of career development professionals in fostering career-readiness in students and reinforce the value of higher education (Stebleton & Ho, 2023; VanDerziel, 2022).

Framework

This study is predicated on Garrison’s self-directed learning framework, synthesizing self-management, self-monitoring, and motivation to begin a task and persist (Garrison, 1997); self-directed learning facilitates the continuous learning requisite to workplace competence in a rapidly changing world (Morris, 2019). Educators, employers, and policymakers must acknowledge that the shift to a lifelong learning mindset will require revised pedagogy from early childhood to adulthood (Dondi et al., 2020) to sustain employability in an ever-changing and unpredictable economic environment (Garrison, 1997).

Literature Review

Although research on college and career readiness has focused on all education levels and cognitive and non-cognitive aspects of academic performance, clear measures of college and career readiness have not been established. As Green et al. (2023) observed, educators and policymakers could use evidence-based insights to prepare a greater number of students who are college and career ready. Multiple opportunities for improvement in promoting student and graduate self-efficacy and readiness for moving forward have been identified (Green et al., 2023) and are presented in Table 1.

Yet, the power and positive potential of faculty interaction with students is a recurring theme, as validated in Table 2.

Year	Source	Challenges
2012	Stevens & Miretzky	College faculty disappointed with students’ ability to perform college-level critical thinking, classroom engagement, and writing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 42% believed that students could not master challenging work • 47% believed students showed no effort in class • 54% believed students were unprepared • 54% believed students lacked critical thinking skills • 69% believed students lacked satisfactory writing skills
2015	Achieve, Inc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 34% of instructors at 2-year colleges and • 43% of instructors at 4-year universities believed students were inadequately prepared to meet college-level work expectations
2017	Youth Truth Student Survey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of high school students feel prepared for college
2018	Gallup Communities in Schools Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25% of U.S. adults believe high school graduates are prepared/very well prepared for college • 22% of U.S. adults believe high school graduates are prepared/very well prepared for the workplace
2018	Condition of College and Career Readiness National Report – ACT Research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 26% of ACT-tested high school graduates “likely have the foundational work readiness skills.”
2018	Strada-Gallup College Student Survey	College students “do not feel prepared for the workplace”: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 35% of students who are younger than 24 years • 43% of students 24 years or older were confident they possessed the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the workplace.
2018	National Association of Colleges and Employers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 66% of college students agreed/strongly agreed that their college education had adequately prepared them for the workforce.

TABLE 1 | Opportunities for improvement.

Year	Source	Solution
2018	Mentoring College Students to Success Report	Examined students’ perceptions of college and career readiness: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% of college alumni agreed that when they were challenged academically, they were better prepared to succeed in life • 69% of college alumni agreed that professors played a critical role in their academic success

TABLE 2 | Positive potential of faculty intervention.

Lovitts (2001) affirmed that interaction with even a single faculty member can strengthen a student's resolve enough to ensure completion. Mentorship programs have yielded promising results toward increasing graduation rates and college preparation, generating reciprocal benefits for both the mentors and mentees (Green et al., 2023; Strada Education Network & Gallup, 2018). This study will contribute evidence supporting strategies for sparking students' and graduates' self-directed learning.

Research Question and Methodology

The study addresses the following research question: How can online higher education institutions expand the role of career influencer beyond career service professionals to improve student and graduate career-readiness? This mixed method study will use both quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches, utilizing a web-based survey complemented by interviews to collect data on fostering career-readiness from faculty, current students, and career service staff. The study population will be faculty, current students, and career advisors at an online university in southwestern United States. Institutional Review Board approval will be earned before data collection begins.

Conclusion

The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) 2023 Job Outlook Survey reaffirmed a disconnect between what students think they have to offer and what employers see (Green et al., 2023; NACE, 2023). College students who engage with their campus career center receive more job offers than those who don't (Gray & Collins, 2023; Gray & Koncz, 2023). Educators can pioneer new approaches that create real-world impact by integrating career readiness competencies into curriculum and directing students to use career services.

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Transforming Supply Chain Management: Blockchain for Ethical Sourcing, Transparency, and Environmental Sustainability



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Abstract

This paper investigates the role of blockchain technology in ethical supply chain management (ESCM), focusing on its ability to enhance transparency, traceability, and accountability. As businesses shift towards ethical practices, including environmental sustainability and fair labor conditions, blockchain's decentralized, immutable ledger offers real-time verification and auditing across the supply chain. Through a narrative review and case studies such as IBM's Food Trust and Everledger's Provenance Proof Blockchain, the paper explores how blockchain fosters trust and operational efficiency. However, challenges such as interoperability, environmental concerns, and integration with existing systems persist. This review highlights key strategies for successful blockchain implementation in ESCM, emphasizing collaboration, education, and overcoming technical barriers. Despite these challenges, blockchain remains a promising technology for promoting ethical and sustainable supply chains.

Keywords: blockchain, ethical supply chain management, transparency, sustainable production, fair labor

Introduction

Over the past 25 years, supply chain management (SCM) has evolved significantly due to technological advancements, globalization, and market demands (Lambert et al., 1998). Traditional SCM prioritizes efficiency, cost reduction, and coordination among firms. However, rising consumer demand for transparency, responsibility, and regulatory compliance drives businesses to adopt and embrace ethical practices. Ethical supply chain management (ESCM) incorporates environmental sustainability,

fair labor practices, and societal issues, addressing risks from unethical practices and promoting sustainability. By adopting ESCM, businesses can gain competitive advantages, drive innovation, and contribute to global goals like fair labor, inequality alleviation, and climate change mitigation. Originally used in finance, blockchain technology is now being adopted across industries, including SCM, driven by its decentralization, transparency, and immutability, which address ethical challenges in modern supply chains (Kosasih et al., 2022).

Purpose

This narrative review investigates blockchain technology in ESCM, providing insights on improving transparency, traceability, and accountability in the chain and exploring best practices and challenges for fostering ethical, sustainable supply chain operations.

Blockchain Technology

Although still in its early stages, blockchain has already had a transformational impact in various domains, including finance and banking, healthcare, supply chain and logistics, and real estate (Gupta et al., 2022). Blockchain is a distributed ledger technology that allows data to be stored across a network of computers in a decentralized and secure manner (Park & Li, 2021). Traditionally, third parties such as banks were used to facilitate and verify exchanges between involved parties in a transaction, acting as intermediaries to ensure stakeholder trust and accountability (Santhi & Muthuswamy, 2022). However, with blockchain, the need for intermediaries is reduced because all participants in the network have access to the ledger in real-time. This transparency fosters trust and accountability directly between stakeholders without relying on centralized authorities (Witt, 2021; Bonnet & Teuteberg, 2022).

A key feature of blockchain is its consensus mechanism. In public blockchains like Bitcoin and Ethereum, participants must agree on the validity of transactions through a process called “mining” (for Proof-of-Work) or “staking” (for Proof-of-Stake) (John et al., 2021). Private or permissioned blockchains are often used in enterprise applications, where only authorized participants can validate transactions. These consensus mechanisms ensure the integrity of data, even in environments where participants may not fully trust one another (Oriekhoe et al., 2024).

Blockchain in Supply Chain Management

Blockchain’s transparency comes from the fact that every transaction is recorded on the ledger and is visible to all participants in the network. For example, in a supply chain context, every stakeholder—whether a manufacturer, supplier, or retailer—can track the movement of products and verify the authenticity of transactions in real-time. Traditionally, supply chains have relied on multiple intermediaries, such as third-party auditors or certification bodies, to verify the authenticity of products and ensure compliance

with regulations. However, blockchain eliminates the need for such intermediaries by providing a single, shared source of truth for all participants in the chain. For instance, when a product moves from a supplier to a manufacturer, a transaction is recorded on the blockchain, documenting the origin, quantity, and movement of goods. Because of its inherent transparency, traceability, and immutability, blockchain is increasingly being recognized as a transformative technology for SCM to combat counterfeiting, stolen products, gray market, fraud, and product recalls (Jabbar et al., 2021). Since every step in the supply chain can be audited with blockchain, organizations benefit with higher trust within the chain and assured regulatory compliance (Santhi & Muthuswamy, 2022; Sunny et al., 2020). Other benefits include the security of information sharing, real-time collection of product data, and quality control throughout the product lifecycle (Azevedo et al., 2023). Thus, its applicability to SCM revolves around fostering transparency, trust, and traceability in such aspects as product tracking, inventory management, supplier verification, payment and settlement, and compliance and auditing (Wang et al., 2023; Ahmed et al., 2022; Aliyu et al., 2018).

Ethical Supply Chain Management

Ethical supply chain management frameworks like stakeholder theory prioritize value creation for all stakeholders—employees, customers, suppliers, the environment—not just shareholders (Mahajan et al., 2023; Co & Barro, 2009). The triple bottom line framework also emphasizes balancing people, planet, and profit (Birkel & Müller, 2021). Core aspects of ESCM include:

- Ethical sourcing and supplier relationships—ensuring safe working conditions, fair pay, and eliminating child labor (Sekhar Bhattacharyya, 2010).
- Supply chain transparency—tracking goods and promoting sustainable sourcing (Eyo-Udo et al., 2024; Birkel & Müller, 2021).
- Environmental sustainability—using renewable materials and addressing issues like climate change (Mahajan et al., 2023).

These elements form the foundation of ESCM, balancing profitability, responsibility, and sustainability.

Methods

This narrative review examines the application of blockchain technology in ethical supply chain management (ESCM). A comprehensive literature search was conducted using academic databases such as EBSCO Discovery Service, Google Scholar, and IEEE Xplore, focusing on articles published between 2018 and 2024. Keywords included “blockchain,” “ethical supply chain management,” and other core aspects of ESCM. Articles were peer-reviewed and selected based on their relevance to the paper’s objectives.

In addition to the literature review, two real-world case studies—IBM Food Trust with Walmart and Everledger’s diamond tracking—were analyzed to assess the ethical impacts of blockchain in ESCM. Both case studies illustrate how blockchain enhances transparency, traceability, and compliance with ethical standards. The review synthesizes findings from 37 selected articles and case studies, highlighting key themes such as blockchain applications in ESCM, strategies for implementation, and challenges to widespread adoption.

Review

The literature review has identified core applications for blockchain technology in ESCM, including its innovative aspects, key strategies for implementation, and challenges faced by organizations.

Application for Blockchain in Ethical Supply Chain Management

- **Transparency and Traceability:** Blockchain’s immutable and secure ledger of transactions significantly enhances traceability and verifying the authenticity of products (Eyo-Udo et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2023; Aliyu et al., 2018). The decentralized nature of blockchain ensures that all transactions are with and validated by the entire network, which enhances security (Wang et al., 2020). Information such as procurement transactions, shipping and logistics details, quality control certifications as ethical and sustainability claims are all transparently stored on the blockchain (Panwar et al., 2023; Lin et al., 2018). Additionally, collusion-resistant fingerprinting provides a solution to identify tampering in content enabling media owners

to track unauthorized digital content back to dishonest users for added verification and accountability (Gonzalez-Compean et al., 2022).

- **Sustainability:** Blockchain allows for monitoring of practices to ensure compliance with sustainability standards (Santhi & Muthuswamy, 2022). The system documents transactions to ensure that materials are ethically sourced and that suppliers uphold environmental protections. This feature allows companies to make claims, about their sustainable practices to both consumers and regulators. Blockchain technology plays a role in identifying suppliers and counterfeit goods by permitting only authorized parties to input information (Lou & Xu, 2024; Esmailian et al., 2020). This function is critical in preventing activities that have an impact on society thereby promoting sustainability (Saber et al., 2018).
- **Fair Labor Practices:** Through the tracking of a product’s history, blockchain empowers consumers and businesses to verify that materials are sourced ethically and under safe, legal, and fair labor conditions (Lou & Xu, 2024). This is evidenced in Cartier et al. (2018), which showcases the use of blockchain-based supply chains in the gem industry to protect against human rights violations. Blockchain supply chains facilitate the alignment of fair trade and labor principles between buyers and sellers based on the trust established through transparency, although fingerprinting and image matching of items linked to the blockchain are used for further validation (Vazquez Melendez et al., 2024).

Key Strategies and Challenges for Implementation

Collaboration among stakeholders is essential for successful blockchain integration in supply chains, requiring active participation from suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and retailers. A cooperative approach ensures that ethical standards are upheld, and transparency is maximized (Panwar et al., 2023). Blockchain’s auditability facilitates compliance with regulations and ethical practices by providing verifiable audit trails, with certifications and quality controls digitally recorded to enhance credibility (Santhi & Muthuswamy, 2022; Chen et

al., 2017). Smart contracts also help enforce quality control (De Giovanni & De Giovanni, 2021). Education and training for all supply chain participants are crucial to overcoming adoption barriers (Sahebi et al., 2020), enabling stakeholders to effectively use the technology and maintain compliance (Kramer et al., 2021). For example, collusion-resistant fingerprinting helps detect tampering in digital content, ensuring supply chain integrity and accountability (Wang et al., 2023).

Blockchain technologies bring several benefits to SCM, such as transparency and traceability, but they also introduce complexities. Some of the key challenges include technological redundancy, interoperability issues, and environmental impact. Many organizations have existing SCM software, and integrating blockchain might lead to redundancy. Further, if blockchain isn't fully adopted across the entire supply chain, its value is diminished. There are interoperability issues between blockchain platforms, and this lack of standardization can make it difficult for supply chain partners to exchange data seamlessly (Belchior et al., 2021). Additionally, blockchain doesn't integrate with existing enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems, which can cause data silos (Cordova et al., 2021). Some blockchain platforms, especially those with PoW consensus mechanisms are notoriously energy intensive. The process of mining and validating transactions consumes large amounts of electricity, which can be unsustainable.

Case Studies in Blockchain for Ethical Supply Chain Management

Several notable case studies highlight the use of blockchain for ESCM. For instance, IBM's Food Trust was developed in collaboration with major food retailers, including Walmart, to enhance the transparency of food production and distribution. The primary goal is to track the journey of food products from farm to table, ensuring that consumers can verify where their food comes from, how it was produced, and whether it meets ethical standards. Using IBM's blockchain, Walmart was able to reduce the time to source products from 7 days to 2.2 seconds, which is crucial for managing food safety and recalls. Farmers in developing countries can prove their products are grown sustainably and ethically, and by providing transparency, the blockchain platform helps to identify inefficiencies in the supply chain, and retailers and suppliers can take action to improve sustainability

(IBM, 2019). Tan et al. (2018) indicates the competitive advantages that lead to operational efficiency and strengthened reputation from using IBM's Food Trust, including (1) enhanced food safety, (2) improved transparency, (3) efficient recalls, (4) compliance with good safety regulations, and (5) consumer trust and loyalty.

Everledger and Gübelin Gem Lab's Provenance Proof Blockchain enhances traceability in the diamond and gemstone industry. Using blockchain and their Emerald Paternity Test, which employs DNA-based nanoparticles, they ensure full traceability of a gemstone's origin. Applied at the source, this nano-IoT technology ensures full traceability of the stone's origin throughout its life cycle, with immutable records stored on the blockchain. This technology prevents the circulation of conflict diamonds (so-called "blood diamonds") by verifying ethical sourcing and making records available to all supply chain participants. It also makes counterfeiting difficult, boosting trust among consumers, miners, and retailers (Everledger, n.d.; Smits & Hulstijn, 2020). Additionally, the nanoparticles make counterfeiting extremely difficult, enhancing trust among consumers, miners, and retailers (Gübelin Gem Lab, n.d.).

Conclusion

Blockchain technology offers significant potential for enhancing ethical supply chain management by improving transparency, traceability, and accountability. As highlighted in the literature, its decentralized ledger and secure data-sharing mechanisms enable organizations to monitor sustainability practices, ensure fair labor conditions, and authenticate product origins. Case studies, such as IBM's Food Trust and Everledger's Provenance Proof Blockchain, demonstrate how blockchain can foster trust, streamline operations, and enhance compliance with ethical standards. However, challenges persist, including interoperability issues, environmental concerns, and the complexity of integrating blockchain with existing supply chain systems. To maximize blockchain's effectiveness, stakeholders must collaborate on implementation strategies, invest in education and training, and address these technical barriers. Despite these hurdles, blockchain remains a transformative tool for organizations aiming to build ethical, sustainable, and transparent supply chains.

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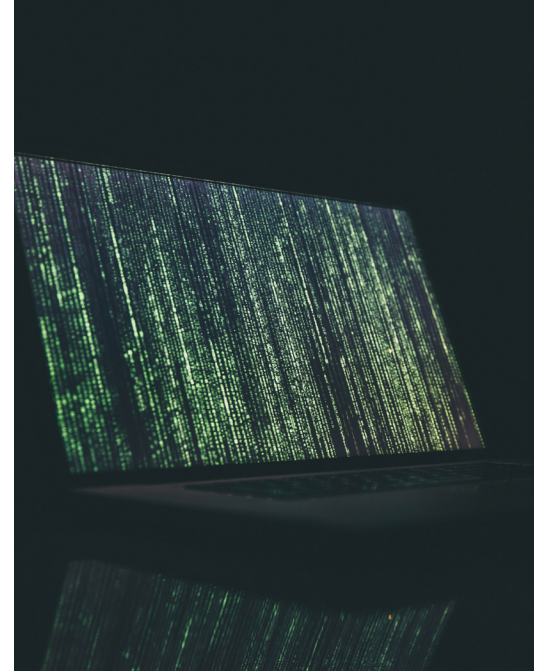
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Transformative Qualitative Research and Reflection: Theoretical Essay



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Abstract

Qualitative studies exemplify transformative research and practice through continuous process improvement. Digital innovation and technology have strengthened qualitative research integrity by enhancing trustworthiness. Recent advances in artificial intelligence have opened new frontiers in this field. This theoretical essay examined how AI-driven virtual reality can enhance the accuracy and efficiency of data collection in qualitative research and the potential of ChatGPT in conducting accurate data analysis. Results indicate that research in this area is still in its early stages, and standard protocols must be established as these technologies continue to evolve.

Introduction

Transformative research and reflection are characterized by questioning existing paradigms, proposing new ways of thinking, and achieving positive social change. Once described as a “new and strange approach to discovery and exploration” (Chenail et al., 2024, para. 1), qualitative research has become an accepted approach to research, reflection, and positive action. This transition was made possible by a commitment to continuous learning about the

practice and understanding of qualitative inquiries. This theoretical essay contributes to transformative qualitative research by presenting evidence-based insights on virtual reality data collection and data analysis using artificial intelligence.

In the evolving landscape of qualitative research, the quest for objectivity and mitigating bias are vital concerns (Lemire, 2023). Though rich in information and experiences, traditional qualitative researchers often grapple with subjectivity (Creswell & Poth, 2016;

Tarnoki & Puentes, 2019). As the complexities of our increasingly digital and interconnected world continue to evolve, there is a pressing need for innovative approaches that can more accurately and impartially capture the multifaceted nature of human experiences (Silk et al., 2021; White, 2023-present). Based on these assertions, the following questions were formulated to explore the potential of AI-driven virtual reality and ChatGPT as data collection tools.

Questions

1. How can AI-driven virtual reality enhance the accuracy and efficiency of data collection in qualitative research?
2. What is the potential of ChatGPT in conducting accurate data analysis in qualitative research?

AI-Driven Virtual Reality as a Data Collection Tool in Qualitative Research

Innovative methods for collecting data in qualitative research are crucial to reduce bias and enhance objectivity while capturing rich, in-depth data (Lobe et al., 2020). Leveraging technology in qualitative research allows researchers to reach participants near and far without requiring in-person interviews (Archibald et al., 2019), thus providing a unique opportunity for broad and extensive participation. This inclusivity, facilitated by technology, allows for a more connected research community and a deeper understanding of complex social phenomena. Numerous innovative digital platform opportunities are available for researchers to collect qualitative data. Virtual reality, a cutting-edge technology, allows researchers to collect data by simulating participant scenarios and observing their behaviors and reactions in a controlled setting (Mathysen & Glorieux, 2021).

Virtual reality (VR) can assist researchers and enhance data collection by creating virtual spaces that foster open communication—enabling researchers to capture a user’s real-world experiences, including verbal and non-verbal communication, and assess their interactions (Holleman et al., 2020; Subramanian et al., 2023; Xu et al., 2020). The interactions recorded within the VR environment provide comprehensive data for analysis and offer an innovative approach (de

Villiers et al., 2022; Dos Santos Marques et al., 2021; Subramanian et al., 2023). This can be accomplished by simulating real-world environments; VR technology creates realistic scenarios where participants can engage, offering valuable data in a non-threatening environment, thereby ensuring ethical considerations in research (Archibald et al., 2019; Subramanian et al., 2023). In a VR environment, data can be collected by observing, recording, tracking, and documenting participants’ interactions and behaviors (Ghisleni et al., 2022; Holleman et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2024; Subramanian et al., 2023).

According to González-Franco et al. (2020), using self-animated avatars in virtual environments has significantly enhanced participants’ responses and communication. Participants can create and customize avatars to convey their emotions, facial expressions, and body movements in real-time (González-Franco et al., 2020; Luo et al., 2024; Taguchi, 2021).

Incorporating avatars can allow researchers to thoroughly evaluate participants’ performance (Luo et al., 2024), leading to a more comprehensive data collection process that fosters authentic interaction and unfiltered information gathering.

Virtual reality has been shown to elicit heightened emotional responses in participants, with data collection options including using sensors in virtual reality headsets and controllers to gather detailed information on participants’ virtual world navigation and interactions (Luo et al., 2024; Taguchi, 2021). These sensors can also measure individuals’ anxiety levels, with data recorded and collected for further analysis (Luo et al., 2024). The collected data can then be processed to identify patterns, trends, and anomalies, offering a unique insight into participants’ emotional responses.

According to Mathysen and Glorieux (2021), the software developed for social science research is limited, and integrating VR into research presents a steep learning curve for researchers. VR technology can present challenges, such as cost, based on the complexity of the study and limited user experience (Hignasari, 2024; Mathysen & Glorieux, 2021). Additionally, Mathysen and Glorieux (2021) and Hignasari (2024) noted that VR is a relatively new product, and large-scale data collection is still limited.

ChatGPT: Potential of Conducting

Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

Qualitative analysis can be challenging; protocols should be established to validate qualitative research and organize, display, and code the data (Clarke et al., 2021). In contemporary times, technological advancements have significantly transformed research and data analysis in qualitative research (Bryda & Costa, 2023). Historically, qualitative researchers relied on software designed to organize and analyze data. However, these programs often fell short in extracting meaning, interpreting findings, and comprehensively analyzing data content (Sen et al., 2023).

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) has prompted the research community to investigate the potential of AI to fulfill the requirements of qualitative data analysis (Hitch, 2024). Researchers have specifically examined ChatGPT for its language generation, comprehension capabilities, and potential to analyze qualitative data (Lixandru, 2024). For example, Sen et

al. (2023) conducted a study to evaluate how ChatGPT could be used in qualitative data analysis by giving the Chatbot a specific set of commands. The version of ChatGPT used in the study by Sen et al. (2023) was the paid version of chatGPT4. See Table 1.

According to Sen et al. (2023), the analysis performed by ChatGPT showed inconsistencies. For example, researchers prompted the Chatbot to analyze the exact text twice to validate the codes generated. The latter revealed different results. Errors were also found in quotes generated by ChatGPT.

In another study, Wachinger et al. (2024) explored ChatGPT's effectiveness in analyzing an interview transcript. The purpose was to compare ChatGPT's analysis to that of an experienced researcher to determine ChatGPT's trustworthiness and precision in thematic analysis. Researchers used the free version of ChatGPT and provided short prompts to instruct the Chatbot. The comparison revealed ChatGPT's limitations in data analysis. Wachinger et al. (2024) selected the free version of ChatGPT3.5 to conduct this analysis. See Table 2.

	Sen et al. (2023)
Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The researchers provided the purpose of the study and the actions to be taken. -Interview transcripts were uploaded in ChatGPT4 (paid version). -Commands were given to the Chatbot to create codes. -Researchers asked ChatGPT to provide statements in the transcripts that are aligned with the codes generated by the Chatbot. -If ChatGPT did not use a direct quote from the participants to support the generated codes, the researchers prompted the Chatbot to support the codes with participants' direct codes. -Commands were given to ChatGPT to generate themes and categories. -Researchers requested direct quotes to support the themes and categories. -The analysis was repeated several times to confirm the results.

TABLE 1 | Data analysis protocol using ChatGPT followed by Sen et al. (2023).

ChatGPT Data Analysis	Experienced Researcher Data Analysis
Wachinger et al. (2024)	
ChatGPT provided only themes	-The expert was able to provide a deeper analysis by sharing codes and themes
The codebook provided was limited to themes	-The expert was able to create a strong codebook
ChatGPT was not capable of producing verbatim quotes in alignment with the themes	-The expert produced verbatim quotes

TABLE 2 | Comparing ChatGPT's ability to perform qualitative analysis to an experienced researcher's.

Artificial intelligence can support a systematic approach and expedite the completion of preliminary thematic analyses (Hitch, 2024). However, AI cannot wholly interpret contextually. In the context of safeguarding objectivity, ChatGPT supported iterative analysis. “In most qualitative research methodologies, ‘there is no dichotomy between subjectivity and objectivity, there is only a dynamic in-between’ (van Wijngaarden et al., 2017, p. 1741).

Ethical Considerations and Recommendations for Future Research

Ethical considerations in using ChatGPT and VR in qualitative research must be carefully assessed to ensure data integrity and to minimize biases introduced by technology (Dana & Gavril, 2023). It is also vital to avoid over-reliance on AI-generated content, as the role of the human researcher remains critical in interpreting data, providing context, and ensuring that ethical standards are upheld (Wachinger et al., 2024). Since ChatGPT and VR rely on large-scale data processing and cloud-based storage, there is a risk of security breaches, hacks, or system vulnerabilities that could potentially compromise participants’ private data (Hua et al., 2024). Additionally, Steele et al. (2020) raised concerns about the well-being of VR users, noting potential safety issues such as dizziness or the risk of falling.

The authors recognize that further research is imperative to understand better the labyrinthine nuances of using AI in data analysis. Future research could include a comparative analysis of how different versions of ChatGPT, such as 3.0 and 4.0, might yield slightly different results in data analysis. This comparison could highlight potential variations in accuracy, pattern recognition, and interpretive capabilities between the versions. Additionally, it would be valuable to explore whether researchers predominantly use the paid versions of ChatGPT for data analysis and interpretation, as these versions may offer enhanced features that could impact the quality of the analysis. Research could also delve deeper into the ethical considerations associated with using AI in data analysis, such as privacy, data security, and the potential for bias in the analysis process.

Conclusion

Integrating AI-driven technologies like VR and ChatGPT into qualitative research represents a transformative shift in data collection and analysis approaches (Bijker et al., 2024; Saab et al., 2021). VR technology offers an innovative approach to capturing rich, immersive data by simulating real-world environments, allowing for the detailed observation and documentation of participant interactions (Luo et al., 2024). ChatGPT, with its advanced language generation and comprehension capabilities, shows promise in conducting preliminary thematic analyses (Sen et al., 2023).

However, these technologies are still nascent, with significant challenges related to user experience and the steep learning curve for researchers. While AI-driven VR and ChatGPT hold significant potential to revolutionize qualitative research, ongoing refinement, and rigorous evaluation are essential (Mathysen & Glorieux, 2021; Wachinger et al., 2024). Establishing standard protocols and addressing current limitations will be critical as these technologies evolve. Future research should focus on developing best practices for integrating these tools to enhance the trustworthiness and efficacy of methodology and design.

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Dr. Lang has been an educator for 28 years. During this time, she served in a variety of different roles. Dr. Lang is a faculty member at the College of General Studies at the University of Phoenix and a professor at Valencia College in the Educator Preparation Institute, where she teaches and designs curriculum geared toward teacher certification in the state of Florida. She graduated from the University of Phoenix with a Doctor of Education degree in September 2022. Dr. Lang is inspired by the condition of education and its opportunity to improve leadership, teaching, and learning at all levels.

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Language, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging in Higher Education

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Abstract

Belonging emphasizes psychological safety, where individuals feel comfortable expressing themselves and taking risks without fear. This concept, often linked to organizational leadership, is universal. In the American public school system, students share the same need for belonging. They want inclusive classrooms where teachers support all students, regardless of their cultural background or English proficiency. Incorporating inclusive language that affirms and supports students' learning styles, refrains from perpetuating stereotypes, and recognizes diverse forms of English while establishing a more welcoming learning environment for all students. International migrant populations within the United States numbered more than 50.6 million in 2020, making this country have more international migrants than any other country. The massive influx of people poses challenges with cultural, ethnic, and language differences merging with the American public school system's established norms, customs, and language. This infusion of various forms of the English language within the public school system presents an opportunity to support diversity and linguistic inclusion and not view it as an inconvenience when encountered by educators. This paper explores the role of language in DEIB principles in secondary education, highlighting the impact of various English language structures used by national and international students. These factors underscore the importance of implementing DEIB practices to enhance student learning and foster a sense of belonging in the classroom.

Keywords: DEIB, inclusive language, linguistics, public schools

Introduction

Belonging recognizes the importance of psychological safety within an environment where people feel comfortable expressing themselves and taking chances without fear (McCalla et al., 2023). This perspective has been closely associated with organizational leadership. However, it is universal because everyone wants to feel like they belong; even individuals in the American public school system are no different and share the same feelings or sentiments about the importance of belonging. Students want to feel like they belong in their classrooms and want their teachers to provide an inclusive and belonging learning environment regardless of their ethnic and cultural background or English usage level and understanding of the English language.

The focus on language, diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) in secondary education goes beyond the goal of establishing a peaceful learning environment. DEIB aims to equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in a globalized and linked society. Diversity recognizes the differences and varieties of origins from which individuals come. Equity creates and perpetuates equal access to and availability of resources for everyone. Inclusion guarantees students are engaged, empowered, and receive recognition and respect (Kayyali, 2022). Belonging has a trifold construction in the placement of diversity, equity, and inclusion: Student perceptions and feelings of being authentic participants in the educational environment, fitting into the overall learning plan, and being accepted by peers, teachers, and administrators (Fernandez et al., 2022). The disposition of this objective requires educational institutions to make a dedicated effort to accept and appreciate differences, guaranteeing that every student feels esteemed and has the chance to succeed.

The American public school system was initially created to prepare white sons and, later, some daughters of the growing middle class of agriculturalists who were independent and free from British rule, with adequate education to govern themselves and maintain a democratic government system (Kober & Renter, 2020). The public school system was initially designed to provide a standard learning curriculum that embraces the United States (U.S.) English language to instruct its students, whether born in the United States or students who

immigrated here from other countries that had their form of the English language. The scope of the American public school was later expanded to incorporate regionalized public schools, where the goal was to prepare students for assimilation and acclimation into the secondary education environment to prepare them for higher education and the workforce (Kober & Renter, 2020). Within the former, students' English may be drastically different from the form spoken and used for instruction in public schools, creating a disparity that has caused a gap in their acquisition knowledge when they encounter opposition from their educators because of this misalignment (Bredtmann et al., 2021).

This misalignment can negatively impact students' educational learning process and make them feel inadequate and discouraged. It has also emphasized the need to focus on the language barriers faced by individuals whose first language is not English, requiring the need to support diversity, inclusion, and belonging in secondary schools. In addition, this issue is increasingly acknowledged as a consequential influence on the educational environment and students' overall learning experiences. This paper discusses the importance of language in diversity, equity, and inclusion principles in the secondary education classroom. A secondary focus is drawing attention to the influence of multiple English language structures learned, spoken, and written by national and international students enrolled in the public education system in the United States and its impact on overall student learning. Both of these issues significantly impact the need to enact diversity, inclusion, and belonging practices for students in the classroom (Athanasas et al., 2019).

Cultural, Language, and Immigration Distinctions

American history's customs, culture, and language have evolved, incorporating shared characteristics and universal aspects of various cultures and customs that shape the country's distinct identity. Even though the elements encompassing each distinctive culture are molded by various influences that mirror the nation's immigration history and involvement in global affairs, language has been the common denominator for the eventual success of the social inclusionary process for immigrants. Seminal works suggest English is

historically and currently the predominant language, universally learned and spoken (Schildkraut, 2001). Historically, in American history, customs, culture, and language had common components, universal meaning, and understanding because most people and their children came from similar backgrounds and cultures and spoke a common language (Johnson, 1999). Therefore, when students started their instructional and learning journey, they not only shared their common language vernacular with their teachers and instructors. They shared a common language within their educational environment, and their textbook contents were uniform and included a standardized learning curriculum of reading, writing, and arithmetic (Middlekauff, 1972; Parker & Parker, 1992). Although sometimes laced with regional language nuances of accented sounds and dialect, the student's learning environment used English as the common denominator of articulation and delivery. The English used there may have drastically differed from what the migrated individuals were accustomed to speaking in their family nucleus. If there were no dialects, English would become more uniform and lose its variety and depth (Cassar, 2023).

Immigration has brought various international people and their families to the classrooms, necessitating the public educational system to become a different learning environment because of the various English or non-English spoken forms. Even the landscape of the United States has experienced dramatic growth, with immigrants from Latin American countries, Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa. Immigrants from Latin America and the Caribbean are identified as people and groups from areas in the Western Hemisphere, including some 50 countries (Selee et al., 2023). In contrast, Asia Americans include but are not limited to groups from China, East India, the Philippines, Vietnam, Korea, and Japan (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021). Sub-Saharan African immigrant groups come from Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Sudan, Tunisia, and Western Sahara (Connor, 2018). Overall, the international migrant population grew to 281 million in 2020, suggesting that 3.6% of the world's population lives away from their place of birth (McAuliffe & Khadria, 2020).

International migrant populations within the United States numbered more than 50.6 million in 2020, making this country have more international migrants than any other country (Natarajan et al., 2022). The massive influx of people poses challenges with

cultural, ethnic, and language differences merging with the American public school system's established norms, customs, and language. This infusion of various forms of the English language within the public school system presents an opportunity to support diversity and linguistic inclusion (Huda & Irham, 2023) and not view it as an inconvenience when encountered by educators.

Education Laws and English as a Second Language

Understanding education laws related to English as a Second Language (ESL) students is the first step in promoting diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) enforces Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination based on race, color, or national origin by entities receiving federal funds. This includes ensuring that language minority students are not denied equal educational access due to limited English proficiency (Office of Civil Rights, 1964). In addition, Title VII of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as the Bilingual Education Act, acknowledges the educational challenges non-English speaking students face. Established in 1968, it set a federal policy to aid educational agencies in supporting students with limited English proficiency by providing funding and supporting professional development and research. Reauthorized in 1994 under the Improving America's Schools Act, Title VII was restructured to enhance state involvement and prioritize bilingual proficiency development. This act also adjusted Title I eligibility, allowing limited-English-proficient students to receive services on the same basis as other students (Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1968; Improving America's Schools Act, 1994). While these court cases focused on school districts and set a significant precedent for the ESL students have the opportunity to gain English proficiency.

Language and Culture

Language has several components that include but are not limited to speech, gestures, regional dialects, and unique sound patterns specific to its culture. On the other hand, speech is the fundamental language element that encompasses how individuals express their thoughts through words and using articulation

and phonetic patterns. The individual's phonetic expression patterns are unique for different cultures and ethnicities. They can influence their learning patterns since they are structures and patterns of speech, gestures, nuance, and postures to which they are accustomed and use to articulate their thoughts and communicate with others. How do these nuances impact how non-English speakers perceive the language spoken within the public school learning environment? Only the teacher can bridge the gap between what the student brings to the classroom environment and how they impart knowledge. To aid in this process, they should be cognizant of the classroom student body and universally seek to understand and embrace different cultures and ethnicities to understand how individuals from different cultures and ethnicities use the English language and embrace them more readily when they enter the classroom since they are being entrenched in a foreign environment. This posture will aid the student in feeling more comfortable and belonging in the environment. As such, they will feel comfortable making mistakes when learning the information the teacher presents, which is essential because when students' conventions and ideals are challenged in a new learning environment, they may feel intimidated and face unfavorable consequences from their teacher due to their difficulties with the English language. This issue emphasizes the importance of understanding culture and ethnicity and their significance in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

An individual's culture is associated with behaviors, thought processes, and concepts accepted and practiced by related groups. More precisely, culture means having a form of traditional behaviors characteristic of a given society, social group, certain race relative to specific periods (Birukou et al., 2013). Ethnicity is defined as people with the same or similar biological and physical features, characteristics, religious habits, and linguistic groups emanating from the same or similar geographic areas (Espinosa et al., 2019). As groups merge, the characteristics associated with culture and ethnicity evolve, and it is not uncommon for individuals to emulate different cultures through exposure. Therefore, to successfully instruct culturally diverse students requires an exchange of interpretive knowledge and a shared understanding, including but not limited to the proximity of educational access with a blended learning student body as part of inclusion and

diversity programs, stressing that these are mutually acceptable principles (Espinosa et al., 2019; Weise & Garcia, 1998). Culture, diversity, and ethnicity are evolving and creating a learning environment of change predicated on language.

Language and World English

As a result of recent migrations, the English language spoken by immigrants is evolving because it is being mixed with other languages, creating new variations of English languages (Vance, 2021). These new language variations affect all social, economic, educational, and political aspects as individuals grapple with articulating their use of the English language to survive in the United States. World English is a term that applies to these various versions of the English language incorporated, forming a new universal way and means of communicating (Huda & Irham, 2023). The infusion and reformatting of the traditional English language affect the culture and environment of secondary education learning, resulting in the postulate that accepting English as a second language by definition or evolution is changing.

Language, Classroom Accommodation, and Inclusion

English as a Second Language, or ESL, is an official designation for individuals whose first or native language is not English. However, though historically an afterthought in classroom instruction, ESL is a critical learning element needed in secondary and postsecondary education for students to successfully transition into American society with English as the primary language (Sull & Seelow, 2023). The American school system mandates assimilation, which includes all participants learning to speak, read, and write using the English presented in the classroom. This same principle applies to secondary education. The opportunity for inclusion is predicated on the speed, clarity, and integrative social levels associated with speaking English. Therefore, better, quicker, and easier language assimilation is required to assist in the learners' success.

To support the rapid articulation, pedagogical teaching practices based on historic theories must evolve, change, and be redesigned to fit and function in new curriculum modes that are culturally and inclusively

appropriate (Koyuncu et al., 2023). This requires teachers to assume a growth mindset whereby they perceive students as having the ability and motivation to improve their language understanding and acquisition to the level the instructors expect and not view them as fixed-minded and cannot be changed (Lou et al., 2021; Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2023). This perspective is meeting the students where they are and assisting them to achieve specific success levels to advance academically.

Language and Higher Education

Higher education, once the academic estate of learning for the traditional American student, has changed in face, facts, family origins, and social discourse involving learning and reverse cultural assimilation. It now assimilates a more congruent platform of teaching and learning based on a design theory authenticated by measuring student ability that includes but is not limited to writing, listening to information, and knowledge extrapolation into user-friendly formats that support social skills development, leading to societal assimilation. Curriculum design and instructional delivery become a partnership where teachers, learning facilitators, and student learners are commensurate partners in working collaboratively to achieve academic goals and professional and personal success. Achievement, as measured for students, should be based on reciprocation and understanding of how local world language is constructed. It should also focus on including new principles of assimilation of students into the classroom environment, including language (Brady & Katre, 2021).

Recommendations for Language, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging

Since language is crucial in influencing the ideas of diversity, inclusion, and belonging in higher education environments, the language of the curriculum and classroom interactions should accurately represent the students' diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. To support culturally diverse students, instructional delivery should integrate text, illustrations, and material from various cultures and languages (Sanders et al., 2020). Incorporating inclusive language that affirms and supports students' learning styles, refrains

from perpetuating stereotypes, and recognizes diverse forms of English while establishing a more welcoming learning environment for all students (Fernandez et al., 2023) is recommended.

Language use that validates and commemorates student identities helps augment and support student feelings of inclusion and belonging (van Heerden & Bharuthram, 2023). In addition, incorporating communication methods that promote transparent and considerate conversation regarding varied student experiences and viewpoints cultivates an all-encompassing atmosphere. Linguistic understanding of English language learning by students from diverse backgrounds is equally important, and facilitating understanding may include utilizing simplified language, offering translations, and utilizing visual aids and technology. Teachers must also display sensitivity towards students by remembering and correctly pronouncing their preferred names and pronouns. Adopting courteous language effectively decreases instances of exclusion and alienation and gives students a sense of belonging.

Making the classroom a place where everyone feels welcome, where cultural differences are respected and celebrated, and where everyone feels like they belong is essential. To better understand students' different backgrounds, instructors should participate in professional development opportunities focusing on cultural competence. This training can facilitate understanding how people from different cultures learn and follow the rules of their original home-based places. Ensuring that lessons and courses cover many different cultural points of view is useful. This will support students' experiences from different backgrounds and make learning more fun and accessible for all.

Additional recommendations include professional development, which includes diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging strategies essential in schools. Providing educators with training in inclusive language, cultural competency, and anti-bias education can empower them with the necessary tools to cultivate a more inclusive atmosphere (Deroo & Ponzio, 2023). Student engagement can be a win-win for students and instructors. Encouraging students to participate in diversity and inclusion efforts, such as peer-led seminars or diversity clubs, allows them to contribute to a more inclusive school atmosphere actively. Schools must incorporate diversity and

inclusion ideas into their policies, curricula, and assessment procedures, ensuring these ideals are active in all aspects of school life.

Community and family engagement are essential. Involving families and the broader community in discussions on diversity and inclusion can help spread these principles beyond the classroom. Fostering a supportive and unified atmosphere for students supports student achievement and academic success. Integrating concepts into teaching methodologies, curriculum development, and institutional regulations can empower educators to establish a fair and nurturing learning atmosphere that benefits all students (Lalas et al., 2019).

Conclusion

Students' inability to comprehend the English language taught in the classroom does not mean they have a deficiency in their intellectual ability (Hacker, 2007). Teachers should capitalize on students' intellect and expand their ability to comprehend the English language as spoken in the instructional delivery. The concept of DEIB supports this novel and adjusted perspective of teachers navigating the students' academic success in the classroom regardless of their English language acquisition. The perspective of including students where they are academically in the classroom should be included as part of the professional development of teachers, policies, and procedures to support the academic growth of linguistically challenged students.

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How Do Indicators of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Compare Between India and China?

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Abstract

Research studies in the past have described the status of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE) in India and China. Gor (2020) used data from global entrepreneurship index reports of 2018 and 2019 to compare the EE between India and China. However, research has not focused on the comparison of the dynamic (longitudinal) aspects of the EE in these two countries. This paper focuses on the comparisons of the indicators of EE in India and China between 2013 and 2023 based on the most recent survey data available from Global Entrepreneurship Monitor. The results of this analysis show that both countries have made some improvements in most of the indicators of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. Further, the results of the non-parametric hypothesis test indicate that the scores of these three countries show a statistically significant difference in the ratios of female to male participation in EE and in the category of the perception of availability of entrepreneurial opportunities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Ecosystem (EE), India, China, female participation in EE

Introduction

In 2023, the World Bank (2024a, 2024b) reported that India had the largest population in the world at 1.43 billion, while China ranked second with a population of 1.35 billion. Moreover, China had the world's second largest GDP (gross domestic product) at \$17.8 trillion USD, while India had the world's fifth largest GDP in 2023 at \$3.9 trillion USD (World Bank, 2024a, 2024b). Gor (2020) compared the entrepreneurial ecosystems of India and China using data from the 2018 and 2019 Global Entrepreneurship Index Reports. Findings from this research indicate that the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) of China is better than India. However,

this research did not analyze the characteristics of entrepreneurial ecosystems in India and China over the entire decade from 2013 to 2023. The main objective of this study is to compare the EE indicators in India and China during this period.

Literature Review

EE in India

Researchers have explored various perspectives on the entrepreneurial ecosystems (EEs) in India, China, and other countries. Chaudhari (2024) stated that

entrepreneurs are the main drivers of innovation, job creation, and economic growth in India. Rani and Kumar (2022) discussed the role of the national government in expanding EE in Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.. Nandy (2020) showed that India, Pakistan and Bangladesh have made improvements in 2020 in most of the EE indicators. However, according to Jacopin (2021) India has failed to develop merchandise exports as China has done.

Cai et al. (2024) found that western and Chinese entrepreneurial ecosystems differ in how they manage resource exchange and network governance across interactions among actors at various levels. Cao and Zhang (2022) documented that it is necessary to promote sustainable development of financial inclusion and entrepreneurship, due to the lack of direct promoting effect from economic development. Zhou (2014) found that not only legal protection of property rights but also the development of market systems mattered for entrepreneurial performance in China. The literature highlights the diverse factors influencing entrepreneurial ecosystems across different countries, emphasizing the role of government policies, sustainable development, and market systems in shaping entrepreneurship.

Methods

The goal of this study is to compare findings from GEM surveys conducted in India and China between 2013 and 2023. Data from 2020 and 2021 are not available because of COVID-19 pandemic. However, based on prior research, it is likely that the annual scores of India and China in the eleven categories of the entrepreneurial ecosystem (EE) will vary., Thus, the research hypothesis is:

H1: Ceteris Paribus, the annual scores of India and China in seven categories will differ.

Parametric hypothesis tests usually assume normal distribution. However, in this analysis, the Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric hypothesis test is used instead of the corresponding parametric ANOVA test to reduce the chance of making Type I errors. A 10% level of significance (risk of type I error) in conducting these hypothesis tests. The test statistic used for Kruskal-Wallis test is designated by H, where:

$$H = \frac{12}{n(n+1)} \left[\frac{\sum(R_1)^2}{n_1} + \frac{\sum(R_2)^2}{n_2} + \dots + \frac{\sum(R_k)^2}{n_k} \right] - 3(n+1),$$

with k-1 degrees of freedom (k is the number of populations)

$\sum R_k$ = sum of the ranks of annual growth rates,

n_k = size of sample k,

and $n = n_1 + n_2 + \dots + n_k$

The distribution of the sample H statistic is close to that of the chi-square distribution with k-1 degrees of freedom when every sample includes at least five observations. This situation is true in our analysis. The p-value of H is calculated using the chi-square distribution with k-1 degrees of freedom.

Annual data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2024a) on EE in China and the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2024b) on EE in India (2024b) were collected to compare the following characteristics:

1. The percentage of the population aged 18-64 who see good opportunities to start a business.
2. The percentages of the population aged 18-64 who believe they have the required skills and knowledge to start a business.
3. The percentages of the population aged 18-64 who are currently an owner-manager of an established entrepreneurial business.
4. The percentage ratios of female entrepreneurs aged 18-64 compared to the percentage for male entrepreneurs in the same age group

Table 1 shows the mean and median values of the

Year	China	India
2023	69.21	82.51
2022	56.48	75.45
2019	74.86	83.10
2018	35.07	49.83
2017	35.21	44.92
2016	37.33	44.34
2015	31.71	37.79
2014	31.88	38.91
2013	33.07	41.43
Average	45.20	55.36
Median	35.21	44.92
Standard Deviation	16.34	18.09

TABLE 1 | Comparison of percentages of 18-64 population who see good opportunities to start a business.

percentages of the population aged 18-64 who see good opportunities to start a business in China and India, with India showing higher values. However, the ratings of perceived opportunities in both countries have shown significant improvement from 2019 to 2023. Table 2 shows the mean and median values of the percentages of the population aged 18-64 who believe they have the required skills and knowledge to start a business, with India showing higher average and median values. Table 3 shows the mean and median values of the percentages of the population aged 18-64 who are currently an owner-manager of an established entrepreneurial business, with India showing slightly higher values. However, the

Year	China	India
2023	55.77	81.60
2022	54.36	78.08
2019	67.35	85.20
2018	24.15	52.22
2017	27.24	42.05
2016	29.82	43.99
2015	27.42	37.84
2014	32.97	36.70
2013	36.29	55.78
Average	39.49	56.83
Median	32.97	52.22
Standard deviation	24.68	18.14

TABLE 2 | Comparison of Percentages of 18-64 population who believe they have the required skills and knowledge to start a business.

Year	China	India
2023	4.17	12.43
2022	3.18	9.04
2019	9.33	11.92
2018	3.16	6.96
2017	6.83	6.22
2016	7.5	4.6
2015	3.12	5.5
2014	11.58	3.73
2013	11.04	10.66
Average	6.66	7.9
Median	6.83	6.96
Standard Deviation	3.24	3.04

TABLE 3 | Comparison of percentages of 18-64 population who are currently an owner-manager of an established entrepreneurial business.

Year	China	India
2023	1.16	0.64
2022	0.72	0.98
2019	0.84	0.75
2018	0.82	0.62
2017	0.87	0.8
2016	0.73	0.56
2015	0.67	0.58
2014	0.84	0.54
2013	0.77	0.49
Average	0.82	0.66
Median	0.82	0.62
Standard Deviation	0.14	0.15

TABLE 4 | Comparison of the ratios of percentage of female 18-64 population who are entrepreneurs to the equivalent percentage for their male counterparts.

percentage of entrepreneurial business owners in India has significantly increased between 2019 and 2023. Table 4 shows the mean and median values of the percentage ratios of female entrepreneurs aged 18-64 compared to the percentage for male entrepreneurs in the same age group, with China showing higher values than India. The values of this ratio have seen significant improvement in China between 2019 and 2023.

Results

The p-value of 0.078 from Table 5 indicates that the null hypothesis of the equal median value of percentage of the population aged 18-64 who see good opportunities to start a firm in the area where they live in China and India can be rejected at 10% significance level. The p-value of 0.575 from Table 6 indicates that the null hypothesis of the equal median value of percentage of the population aged 18-64 who believe they have the required skills and knowledge to start a business in China and India cannot be rejected. The p-value of 0.353 from Table 7 indicates that the null hypothesis of the equal median value of percentage of the population aged 18-64 in China and India who are currently an owner-manager of an established business (i.e., owning and managing a running business that has paid salaries, wages, or any other payments to the owners for more than 42 months) cannot be rejected. The p-value of 0.024 from Table 8 indicates that the null hypothesis of the equal median value of percentage of the population aged 18-64 who are either a nascent entrepreneur or owner-manager of a new business, divided by the equivalent percentage for their male counterparts in China and India can be rejected at 10% level of significance.

Conclusion

This analysis concludes that some characteristics of the entrepreneurial ecosystems in India and China from 2013 to 2023 are quite similar. China demonstrates a statistically significant difference from India in the ratio of female to male entrepreneurs within the 18-64 age group. Therefore, in China between 2013 and 2023 participation by women in EE is much better than in India. Conversely, India shows

a statistically significant difference from China in the percentage of the population aged 18-64 who perceive good opportunities to start a business in their local area between 2013 and 2023. This indicates that in India, the perception of opportunities to participate in the entrepreneurial ecosystem is stronger than in China. However, the percentages of the population aged 18-64 who believe they have the required skills and knowledge to start a business and the percentages of the population aged 18-64 who are currently an owner-manager of an established entrepreneurial

Country	N	Mean Rank
China	9	7
India	9	10.8

Chi Square	3.109
Degrees of Freedom	1
P value	0.078

TABLE 5 | Results from Kruskal Wallis Hypothesis Test on comparison of percentage of 18-64 population who see good opportunities to start a firm in the area where they live.

Country	N	Mean Rank
China	9	5.67
India	9	12.22

Chi Square	0.313
Degrees of Freedom	1
P value	0.575

TABLE 6 | Results from Kruskal Wallis Hypothesis Test on comparison of percentage of 18-64 population who believes they have the required skills and knowledge to start a business.

Country	N	Mean Rank
China	9	8.3
India	9	10.7

Chi Square	0.859
Degrees of Freedom	1
P value	0.353

TABLE 7 | Results from Kruskal Wallis Hypothesis Test on percentage of 18-64 population who are currently an owner-manager of an established entrepreneurial business.

Country	N	Mean Rank
China	9	12.3
India	9	6.7

Chi Square	5.07
Degrees of Freedom	1
P value	0.024

TABLE 8 | Results from Kruskal Wallis Hypothesis Test on comparison of the ratios of percentage of female 18-64 population who are entrepreneurs to the equivalent percentage for their male counterparts.

business are not statistically different in India and China between 2013 and 2023. The results from this study indicate that there are ample opportunities for improvement in EE in both India and China. The governments of India and China need to adopt entrepreneur-friendly policies that will improve the overall effectiveness of the entrepreneurial ecosystems.

About the Author

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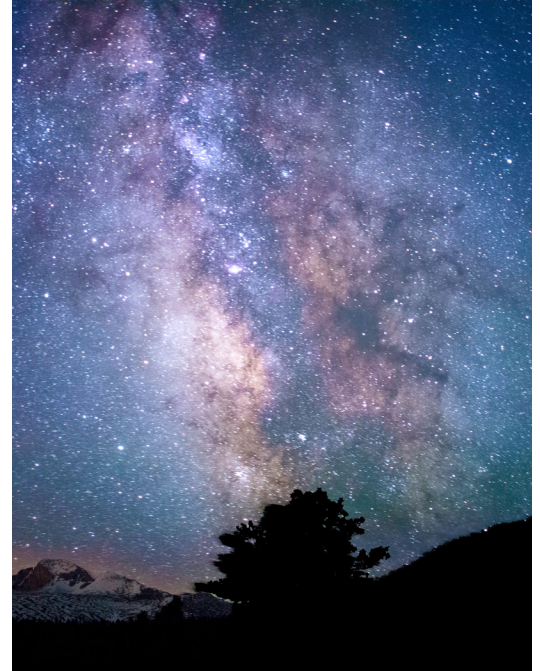
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Decolonizing Western Mental Health Sciences: Toward More Scientific Rigor and Cultural Relativism

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Abstract

Anti-Psychiatry and Decolonizing Psychiatry and Psychology share common cause in challenging the power of Western Psychiatry. One legacy of Western colonialism is the exportation of Western psychiatry to former colonies which may be inappropriate for indigenous peoples and not account for their culture, economic system, beliefs, folklore. Smith (2012) for example called for “Decolonizing Methodologies” in science and medicine. Western science and psychiatry have likewise attempted to advance certain social philosophies at home. Eugenics is the obvious example. Others include using the concept of “mental illness” as a tool to control slaves and women. Two recent panics underscore the need for more regulation (from the APAs) of science, medicine, and psychology: the repressed memory and satanic ritual abuse panics.

In “Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples,” Linda Tuhiwai Smith introduces one type of transformational research – decolonization studies. Decolonization studies in psychiatry and psychology are one instance where a powerful group uses science to dominate another less powerful group. Let us review important points about decolonial psychiatry and compare to forms of domination by science and psychiatry within the borders of the US. The most blatant example within US borders would be the eugenics era, when mainstream science embraced a very wrong conclusion. The consequences were awful, culminating in forced sterilization for many. Francis Galton and Henry Goddard used psychological principles to support eugenic ideas (Galton, 1909; Dorfman, 1982).

Culture, including language, folkways, economic systems, ideas, beliefs, institutions, tools, can be

an important part of an individual’s psychological makeup according to a cultural relativism perspective. It is a variable to be considered when investigating cognition, including memory. For instance childhood memories of Westerners are specific but the memories of Asian people were more about group activities. Memory tests show these differences. There are, however, individual differences in memory in addition to effects between these two groups. Culture can affect what is retrieved from memory and must be considered (Leger & Gutches, 2021).

The Journal of Eugenics is long dead. This was no fringe or pseudoscience. This was mainstream science gone off the deep end. Fortunately, transformational thinkers like Franz Boas and Margaret Mead worked prolifically (Mead, 1928; Boas, 1940), and even more fortunate – science is self-correcting. Psychiatry and psychology grew up alongside the western industrial

revolution and capitalism and are basically products of western culture. Since we see this power struggle occur over and over in the West, we don't have to look at literal colonization to see how this works -- but we will.

Psychiatry and Psychology, usually presented as scientific and humanitarian, have been criticized as tools of Western colonialism, imposing Western norms and suppressing indigenous cultures. Their origins have links to colonialism. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, European colonial powers established asylums, schools and hospitals in the colonies, often as extensions of control mechanisms. These institutions were not only used to care for the mentally ill, but also to isolate and manage those who resisted colonial rule. In India, for example, the British established workhouses that served as both psychiatric institutions and instruments of social control (Mills, 2014).

Psychiatric diagnoses are often influenced by colonial attitudes. Indigenous beliefs are often medicalized and pathologized. Behavior that is considered irrational or primitive is classified as mental illness. This is used to justify intervention by presenting it as a mission to cure the "madness" of indigenous populations. Often indigenous knowledge and practice is ignored, and Western ways promoted.

Western psychiatric models and diagnostic criteria, such as those contained in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), have been exported worldwide without regard to cultural differences. Traditional healing practices, which often include a community-based approach and holistic understanding of well-being are often rejected by Western psychiatry. In many cases, these practices are considered superstitious or unscientific and those who follow them as requiring Western psychiatric intervention. The legacy of colonial psychiatry continues to influence mental health practices. The global dominance of Western psychiatry means that non-Western cultures struggle to maintain their own mental health traditions. This hegemony leads to misapplication of Western diagnostic criteria and treatment. For example, the widespread use of Western psychiatric drugs in non-Western countries may disrupt traditional healing practices that are more culturally appropriate and effective. The global reach of pharmaceutical companies ensures Western psychiatric drugs are heavily advertised and

prescribed, at a handsome profit, often without due regard for cultural differences and local needs. As the field of psychiatry continues to grow it should take a critical look at its own history and seek to decolonize its practices to better serve different communities around the world. In many African and Native American cultures, mental health is closely related to spiritual and social well-being. Traditional healers such as shamans and herbalists play an important role in maintaining mental health through rituals, herbal medicine, and community support. Ethical marketing practices that respect cultural differences and prioritization of the welfare of patients ahead of income should be pursued. Incorporating these approaches can improve treatment outcomes (Comas-Díaz, L. et al., 2024).

Decolonization requires a fundamental shift in mental health attitudes, moving away from a scale that fits all model in favor of one that is inclusive, respectful, and responsive to cultural difference. It involves embracing multiple perspectives, recognizing the value of indigenous knowledge, and addressing the imbalance of power with historically shaped psychiatric training. It is often assumed that theories and practices developed in Western contexts are universally applicable. These models are rooted in specific cultural assumptions and values that may not coincide with other societies. Western psychology often emphasizes individualism, self-actualization, and personal autonomy. These concepts may not resonate with cultures that prioritize collectivism, community, and interconnectedness. The same "symptoms" can have different meanings and implications.

Institutions such as the American Psychological Association (APA) play a major role in shaping the field of psychology. These organizations often set standards for research, training, and education based on Western models. Decolonizing Psychology requires these institutions take a critical look at their policies and practices, ensuring they are inclusive and respectful of different cultural perspectives. International collaborations and partnerships can help promote a more inclusive approach. By working with professionals from a variety of backgrounds, global institutions can develop guidelines and practices that reflect a wider range of experiences and understandings.

The steps in decolonizing psychology and psychiatry include:

1. Including cultural and indigenous knowledge in curricula to ensure training in culturally competent skills.
2. Supporting and funding research conducted by scholars from non-Western backgrounds.
3. Adapting Western diagnostic tools to make them more culturally sensitive and more psychometrically sound.
4. Encouraging collaboration between psychologists from different cultural backgrounds to develop more inclusive and effective mental health interventions.
5. Working with global institutions and policymakers to promote policies that support cultural competence and inclusivity in psychological practice (Smith, 2012).

The American Psychological Association has endorsed Decolonizing Psychology through its president (Bryant, 2023), although this has met with opposition by those who see a cultural adjustment to be unscientific and seek to promote “traditional therapies” (Critical Therapy Antidote, 2023).

Besides Colonialism per se, Psychology and Psychiatry are used by powerful groups to exert control over their own citizens at home. The following are examples.

“Drapetomania,” was an alleged mental illness described by American physician Samuel A. Cartwright in 1851. It was described as uncontrollable desire to escape from captivity. Cartwright argued that this condition was a mental illness caused by the treatment of their slaves by masters as equal, which he considered unnatural and led to a desire for slave freedom. Labeling slaves who sought freedom as mentally ill served to further control and oppress them. It provided scientific justification for cruel punishment and repressive measures to prevent escapes and rebellions (Szasz, 1960).

African Americans in the United States have a history of being over diagnosed with schizophrenia, which some researchers believe reflects racial bias in the psychiatric profession. Similarly, LGBTQ+ people have been pathologized for much of the twentieth century. These practices show how a powerful psychiatry, medical organizations, and even general scientific organizations can be used to enforce social norms and marginalize those who deviate from them, at home or abroad (Szasz, 1960).

Hysteria has a long and problematic history in psychiatry, especially when applied to women. One of the most well-known treatments for hysteria is the “rest cure,” popularized by Dr. Silas Weir Mitchell. This treatment includes complete bed rest, separation from family and friends, and a diet rich in milk and fatty foods. Women were not allowed to participate in any intellectual or physical activity. Other treatments include electrotherapy, and hypnosis, used by figures such as Charcot and Sigmund Freud. In some extreme cases, women undergo surgery such as hysterectomy in the belief that their reproductive organs are the source of their suffering (hysterectomy is still overused today). Feminist researchers have criticized the concept of hysteria as a tool of patriarchal control (Szasz, 1960). This instance of patriarchal control at home is analogous to western colonial efforts abroad and serves the same purpose of exerting power.

The repressed memory controversy in the United States revolves around debate about the importance of repressed memories particularly in the context of psychotherapy and court cases. The concept of repressed memories goes back to early psychoanalytic theory. Freud’s theory captured academia for many decades and was a popular theme in movies. Because Freud was a medical doctor, it had the influence of the powerful medical profession behind it. There was scant scientific evidence for the repression theory (Hilgard & Bower, 1975). After making negative assessments in previous editions, and after exhaustive reviews of the literature on repression, Hilgard & Bower (1975, p. 362) could state bluntly, “there is, unfortunately, not much acceptable experimental evidence for ideational repression.” Modern controversy clearly appeared in the 1980s and 1990s. Studies have shown that while trauma can affect memory, the mechanisms of memory suppression and retrieval are poorly understood. Memory research suggests that memories can be malleable, raising concerns about the reliability of recovered memories. Many criminal cases in the 1990s involved repressed memories of abuse (Loftus, 1996).

In the face of a lack of empirical support, therapists cannot continue to use the concept of repression of traumatic memories as if it were a fact. One of the points of this paper is that there is as yet no reliable way of retrieving forgotten memories. Most recently, this point is emphasized by Loftus (1996), a prominent memory researcher and a founder of the Association for Psychological Science. The transformation

recommended in this paper is one of injecting more scientific rigor into certain topics in Psychology and Psychiatry, such as memory. On this there seems to be general agreement among experts from both the APA and APS that any present techniques of memory retrieval are not based in science despite an effort to relabel the memories as forgotten due to “amnesia.” One of the dangers of this lack of scientific support is that Psychology and Psychiatry will be misused as a way of obtaining criminal convictions. Dr. Loftus was a frequent expert witness helping to overturn many convictions, a dark era in the history of Psychology and Psychiatry (Loftus, 1996). This author was an expert witness in one trial. Arguably, this transformation is as important, if not more so, as the Behavioristic and Cognitive revolutions.

This does not mean that there is no evidence at all that repression of traumatic memory might exist and is retrievable. MRI studies exist, for instance, with one researcher being applauded for finding “a potential brain circuit mechanism underlying individual differences in dissociative symptoms” (Kendall, 2021). One promising line of research using mice found that a mechanism involving “engrams” and “astrocytes” underly individual differences in dissociative symptoms (Williamson et al., 2024). Much more research would be needed to conclude that therapists can be trained to help retrieve memories reliably.

The McMartin Preschool Trial was one of the most sensational cases based on recovered memories. The case ended in acquittal and sparked a lot of controversy, but only after the family business was destroyed, family members spent time in jail, and the prosecution spent a lot of time and money in a vain attempt to dig up supposed abuse “tunnels” below the property. The American Psychological Association (APA) belatedly issued guidelines that emphasize the need for caution in the use of suggestive techniques and recognizing the complexity of memory. The False Memory Syndrome Foundation (FMSF) was founded in 1992 by families who believe they had been falsely accused of abuse based on recovered memories. FMSF advocates for greater scientific investigation and legal protections and for keeping families together (Loftus, 1996; Nathan & Snedeker, 1995).

The McMartin case also had elements of a simultaneously spreading fear: that of satanic ritual abuse in the United States. The 1980 book *Michelle Remembers* by psychiatrist Lawrence Pazder and his

patient (and later wife) Michelle Smith was one of the catalysts. The book claims to document Michelle’s recovered memories of how she was abused by a satanic cult (Smith, 1989). Many preschool employees, teachers and parents were charged with satanic abuse and frequently convicted. Many of these convictions eventually ended in overturns due to lack of evidence and concern about the credibility of the testimony. The APA belatedly sent memory experts like Elizabeth Loftus to testify in court about how memory really works. Some professionals faced legal and ethical consequences for their role in spreading fear. The American Psychological Association and other organizations issued guidelines to prevent similar incidents from happening in the future (but were slow to do so). In the mid-1990s, the number of allegations began to decline while the lack of evidence and the role of suggestive therapeutic practices became more widely recognized. The panic highlighted the dangers of moral hysteria, the potential for therapeutic abuse, the effect of sensationalist media, and the importance of critical thinking and evidence-based training in both mental health and law enforcement. The first APA statement formally addressed the issue in 1993 through a statement acknowledging the complexity of the issue and the need for careful consideration of evidence in the case of claims involving recovered memories. In 1994, the APA published a more comprehensive report, “Working Group on the Investigation of Memories of Child Abuse,” which provided detailed guidance on the issue. The report highlights the possibility of suggestibility and the formation of false memories (Loftus, 1996; Sagan, 1995).

The Stanford Prison Experiment, conducted by psychologist Philip Zimbardo in 1971, is one of the most well-known and controversial studies in social psychology. The impact of power is investigated by assigning volunteers to guard or inmate roles in a simulated prison environment. Participants assigned the role of “guards” quickly adopted authoritarian behavior while those assigned as “prisoners” became passive and stressed. The experiment had to be stopped after only six days due to the intense emotional stress experienced by the participants. With all its blemishes, the Stanford Prison Experiment is considered transformative because it fundamentally changed our understanding of the power of situational influences and social roles in behavior (Zimbardo, 1973). This stark demonstration of the power of

authority informs both Anti-Psychiatry and Decolonial Psychiatry.

No such panics emerged in Asia. The ideas failed to export there, likely due to different religious and cultural traditions. The repressed memory and satanic ritual abuse episode in the West are just recent examples which highlight the damage that can be caused by science which is left unregulated and which does not take culture into account.

Abuses of psychiatry, especially western psychiatry, are more important now than they ever were. A disturbing case is that of a young Dutch woman who was recently euthanized in the Netherlands. She was told she had a mental illness, an incurable depression, and that there was nothing could be done about it. She then proceeded to request euthanasia, legal in the Netherlands. It is a horrific tragedy, contributed to by the western psychiatric model. Depression can often have physiological manifestations or even possibly be caused by a physiological problem of some type, but this is certainly not always the case. Depression can easily be part of the human condition and not be an illness. The woman could have been helped through religion and philosophy, among other fields. To be told she had an incurable mental illness is reflective of the unscientific concepts seeping into psychiatry, and its hubris (Reilly, 2024).

For the past couple of years we have been subjected to each political party in the US striving to show that the opposing presidential candidate has a “mental illness,” or as they favor, a “cognitive decline.” Mental health practitioners weigh in on this regularly, trying to lend the support of their disciplines to it. It is reminiscent of the diagnosis “revolutionary madness” of Soviet psychiatry. As accusations of cognitive decline are all over the news, this does not need documentation.

The repressed memory controversy which caused so much distress, family breakups, jailings, etc. is not over. Despite the best efforts by Hilgard and Bower (1975) in the classic *Theories of Learning* to demonstrate the paucity of scientific support for repressed memory, it persists. While most wrongly accused have been released, there are still people in jail. The work of the APAs and especially the Association for Psychological Science and memory experts like Elizabeth Loftus would still seem to be vitally important in this regard. Brewen (2021) argues the whole matter should be dismissed because no therapists actually believe in unconscious repression anymore. Otgar et al.,

(2021) demonstrate support for the notion that belief in unconscious repression is still widespread. Just as many psychological tests have low reliability or validity, so too is the retrieval of hidden memories, at least as yet.

About the Author

Dr. Louis G. Daily was awarded a Ph.D. in Human Development from Bryn Mawr College in 1992 for his dissertation “Perception of Infant Expressions of Affect in High-Risk Parenting.” He worked as a protective services worker for ten years with the Philadelphia Department of Human Services and for fifteen years as a research analyst with the Philadelphia Department of Public Health, and Coordinating Office for Drug and Alcohol Abuse programs. He has taught as an adjunct instructor at many Philadelphia area colleges and currently teaches online for the University of Phoenix. He teaches research and statistics courses and various psychology courses such as Learning Theories.

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Review of *What Happened to You?*

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Abstract

Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey explore trauma, resilience, and healing, reframing the question from “What’s wrong with you?” to “What happened to you?” This shift offers deeper insights into how trauma affects behavior and emotional responses. By blending scientific knowledge with the authors’ personal experiences, the book provides practical strategies for overcoming adversity and fostering personal growth. The accessible, conversational format makes complex neuroscience understandable and applicable to a broad audience. For educators and students in online learning environments, the book is particularly valuable, offering strategies to manage stress, build resilience, and create supportive relationships. It equips both teachers and learners with tools for success, enhancing emotional well-being, and fostering a deeper understanding of the parallel connections behind the whys of student persistence.

Review of *What Happened to You?*

The collaboration between Dr. Bruce Perry and Oprah Winfrey in “What Happened to You?” offers a profound exploration of trauma, resilience, and healing. Through empathetic understanding and scientific insights, this book explores the reasons behind our behaviors and emotional responses. Framing Dr. Perry’s professional experiences with his clients, Oprah’s personal childhood experiences, and personal accounts from guests on The Oprah Winfrey Show, the book addresses the question of “What happened to you?” rather than “What’s wrong with you?” to foster greater empathy and self-understanding. This change represents a fundamental paradigm shift in trauma-informed care that challenges existing norms and proposes new frameworks for understanding learning

and human behavior. The engaging, conversational style between the authors provides vivid anecdotes and real-life examples, making complex concepts accessible to a broad audience. They discuss how trauma affects the brain and behavior, and how understanding these effects can foster healing and growth. Personal and shared life experiences become powerful opportunities for learning and development, as meticulously detailed across the ten chapters of this #1 New York Times Bestseller. The book also emphasizes the importance of nurturing relationships and supportive environments in fostering resilience. By combining personal stories with scientific explanations, Perry and Winfrey create a compelling narrative that not only informs, but also inspires readers to embark on their own journeys of healing and self-discovery. Actionable strategies

for overcoming adversity, building resilience, and self-healing are showcased through each story shared, offering readers practical tools to apply in their own lives.

Strengths

“What Happened to You?” stands out for its ability to simplify complex neuroscientific concepts and making difficult life experiences comprehensible through engaging storytelling. The book seamlessly integrates personal anecdotes from the childhoods of Winfrey and her show’s guests, with practical scientific evidence from Dr. Perry to create stories that are both relatable and informative. One of the book’s greatest strengths is its compassionate, empathetic approach, which invites readers to reflect on their own life experiences and view themselves and others through a lens of understanding rather than judgment. This thoughtful blend of science and personal narrative provides a holistic perspective on trauma and resilience, making the content not only educational but also deeply moving. Furthermore, the actionable strategies presented throughout the book empowers readers to apply these perspectives to their own lives, fostering personal growth and healing. By addressing both the emotional and intellectual aspects of trauma, “What Happened to You?” excels as a comprehensive guide for anyone seeking to understand and overcome the impacts of their past.

Weaknesses

While “What Happened to You?” offers awareness into understanding reactions, thoughts, and feelings, some readers might struggle to apply the content to their own personal situations. Personal change is difficult as it requires self-awareness, consistency, resilience, grit and many other characteristics that often involve working with a professional to establish habitual practice. The strategies for dealing with the discussed traumas could be more robust and presented in a self-help manner to better support readers overcoming their past experiences without relying on professionals, like Dr. Perry, to implement positive change. Additionally, the book would benefit from including blank pages and thought-provoking prompts at the end of each chapter. These additions would provide readers with opportunities for notetaking, guided reflection, and journaling to enhance the ability

to engage with and personalize the material. Such interactive elements could significantly strengthen the book’s practical impact and foster deeper personal connections.

University of Phoenix Significance

For educators and students alike, “What Happened to You?” is an indispensable resource for personal and academic development, especially within the realm of online education. The virtual learning environment brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds, often under challenging circumstances. Understanding the effects of trauma and the importance of resilience is crucial for success in the online learning environment. Online students frequently juggle multiple responsibilities and personal challenges, making effective stress management, emotional intelligence, and the ability to build a supportive network essential. This book offers valuable strategies to navigate challenges, equipping readers with the tools needed for success. By fostering a deeper understanding of trauma and resilience, “What Happened to You?” enhances the ability of both educators and students to succeed academically and personally.

Personal Reflection

As a spouse, parent, daughter, educator, coach, and friend, I am thankful for reading, “What Happened to You?” The book’s approach to understanding trauma describes situations that hit home in so many ways. Understanding myself better through my own relationships and adverse childhood experiences has allowed me to better serve my responsibilities in a way that has been life changing. I appreciated the practical implications for supporting mental health and fostering a more empathetic approach to my personal and professional relationships. This book also allowed me to connect my thoughts and feelings to being a better educator and understanding what my students might be going through and where they are coming from. In particular, understanding resilience and what that could look like in their world is valuable for online students facing challenges in balancing their studies with many day-to-day responsibilities.

I highly recommend “What Happened to You?” to anyone who would like to understand themselves and

others better. Serving my learning and comprehension best, I loved having the hard copy of the book in my hands while listening to the Audible version. The Audible version is beautifully narrated by Perry and Winfrey together which further drew me into the science and connection to each story. Hearing the authentic clips from Oprah's show guests tell their own stories had an emotional impact that would have been lost reading the book alone.

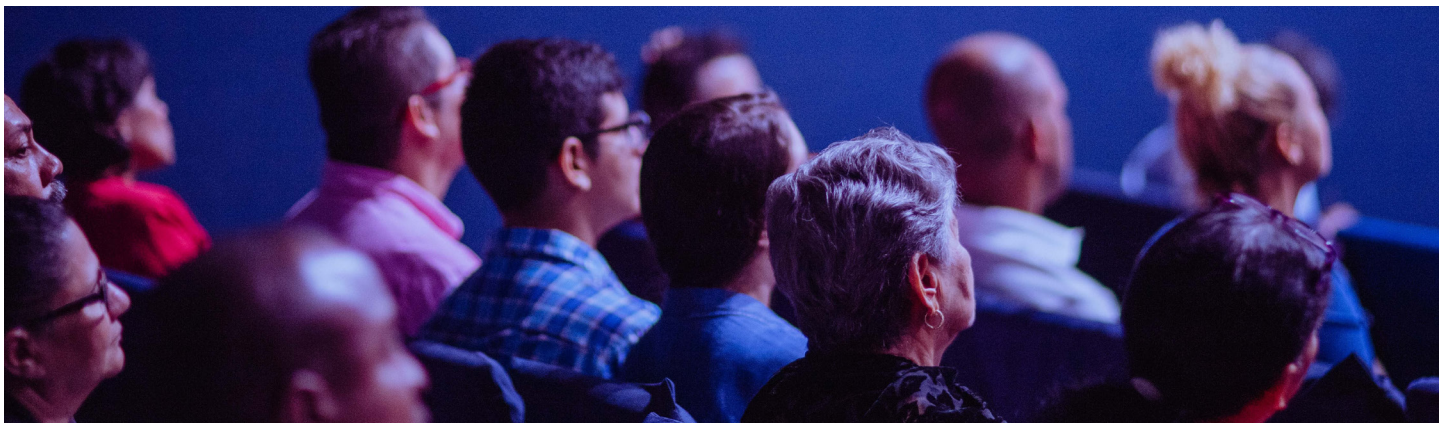
Overall, the book's exploration of trauma and resilience provides essential strategies for personal development and emotional well-being, which are critical for thriving in life, not just surviving.

Perry, B. D., & Winfrey, O. (2021). *What happened to you? Conversations on trauma, resilience, and healing*. Flatiron.

About the Author

Dr. Melinda Kulick serves the University of Phoenix as an Assessment Manager on the Assessment and Institutional Research (AIR) team, Associate Faculty member for the College of Doctoral Studies, and the Center for Educational and Instructional Technology Research (CEITR) Fellow. Dr. Kulick is passionate about understanding the associations of neuroscience, behavior, and technology with advancing innovative teaching and learning strategies, which she explores through both research and practice. Dr. Kulick is a Pennsylvania certified Business, Computer, and Information Technology teacher from Robert Morris University and has earned a BS in Business Administration and MS in Multimedia Technology from California University of Pennsylvania, and Doctorate in Instructional Leadership in Higher Education and Technology from Argosy University.

Upcoming Events and Workshops



The College of Doctoral Studies offers a variety of events and workshops for students, faculty, and alumni. Below, you will find information for upcoming events and workshops; to access the full calendar please visit the [Workshop Calendar](#) on the Research Hub. All events are in the Arizona time zone, which does not observe daylight savings time. Feel free to reach out to us if you have an idea for a future event or workshop.

Date	Time	Title & Presenter	Description	Details
12/10/24	5 PM (MST)	Doctoral Students Orientation Dr. Nicole Baker	Students who are in the beginning stages of their doctoral program or those looking for a refresher before beginning doctoral seminar classes are invited to attend the Doctoral Student Orientation. During the orientation, we will be sharing some information about what to expect, information about our program, and helpful resources that are available for students. During the workshop, we will share tips on how to be successful in their doctoral programs.	Via Zoom
12/12/24	4 PM (MST)	Student Writing Development - DD CDS Student Writing Team	When writing in an academic environment, faculty requires students to utilize articles from peer-reviewed journals. A student may see the phrase “refereed journal” or “scholarly journal” and both are used to describe the same type of journal. But what are peer-reviewed, refereed, or scholarly journal articles, and why do faculty require their use?	Via Zoom
12/14/24	4 PM (MST)	DHA Student Networking DHA Faculty	An opportunity for DHA students to meet others along the dissertation journey, gather insights, and build a community of learning.	Via Zoom
01/09/25	4 PM (MST)	Student Writing Development - DD CDS Student Writing Team	This interactive session is designed to assist students with the process of developing ideas around topics related to their programs into researchable problem statements, purpose statements, and solid research questions. Students are encouraged to bring ideas for development within guided development activities.	Via Zoom

Date	Time	Title & Presenter	Description	Details
01/11/25	4 PM (MST)	DHA Student Networking DHA Faculty	An opportunity for DHA students to meet others along the dissertation journey, gather insights, and build a community of learning.	Via Zoom
01/14/25	5 PM (MST)	Scholarship Development Dr. Mark McCaslin	Conference Proposal Conference This webinar helps the participants develop acceptable proposals for ILA 2025 conference.	Register through this link
01/16/25	4 PM (MST)	Student Writing Development - DD CDS Student Writing Team	This session will allow students to familiarize themselves with some of the basic format requirements. This session will highlight general guidelines students should know, familiarize students with effective utilization of the manual, and present the mechanics of some of the more common citation and resource formats.	Via Zoom
01/18/25	9 AM (MST)	CDS Student Coffee Chat The CDS Coffee Chat Team	The College of Doctoral Studies Student Coffee Chat (SCC) is a virtual, bi-monthly event aimed at fostering student success. Each session includes a lively discussion, with like-minded people, for inspiration and guidance as students advance within their programs and beyond. Student Coffee Chat sessions are open to all active CDS doctoral students and CDS alumni.	Register via the CDS Coffee Chat Page
01/21/25	5 PM (MST)	Research Designs Dr. Mansureh Kebritchi	Title: Case Study Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion Description: This webinar provides detailed explanations and examples for successfully conducting data analysis and writing the findings and discussion of a case study design. Participants may bring their examples to discuss.	Register through this link
01/28/25	5 PM (MST)	Research Tools and Skills Wilson Tsu from the PowerNotes Company	Title: PowerNotes Attend this webinar to learn best practices for using PowerNotes.	Register through this link
02/04/25	5 PM (MST)	Professional Development Dr. Louise Underdahl	Title: UOPX doctoral graduate guest speaker: Dissertation of the Year Awardee, Mikel Yost DOY winner for DM Description: Join this webinar to learn about the doctoral journey of the speaker and how the doctoral degree from UOPX impacted the career development of the speaker.	Register through this link

Date	Time	Title & Presenter	Description	Details
02/05/25	4 PM (MST)	Mastering the MEAL Plan and Synthesizing Evidence in Doctoral Writing CDS Student Writing Team	In this session, we will dive deep into the essentials of scholarly paragraph construction and advanced writing techniques. Learn how to effectively implement the MEAL Plan—Main Idea, Evidence, Analysis, and Link—to structure academic paragraphs with precision and clarity. We will also explore the art of synthesizing evidence, providing students with the skills to seamlessly integrate information from multiple sources into a cohesive and compelling narrative.	Via Zoom
02/08/25	9 AM (MST)	DHA Student Networking DHA Faculty	An opportunity for DHA students to meet others along the dissertation journey, gather insights, and build a community of learning.	Via Google Meeting
02/11/25	5 PM (MST)	Research Design Dr. Mansureh Kebritchi, Dr. Karen Johnson, Dr. Jim Lane, and Dr. Stella Smith	Title: Exploring the Essential Components of Qualitative Designs Description: Join us for an insightful webinar that delves into the key differences between essential components of various qualitative research designs. This engaging session will feature a panel of experienced researchers and methodologists who will shed light on the nuances of different qualitative approaches.	Register through this link
02/13/25	5 PM (MST)	Doctoral Students Orientation Dr. Nicole Baker	Students who are in the beginning stages of their doctoral program or those looking for a refresher before beginning doctoral seminar classes are invited to attend the Doctoral Student Orientation. During the orientation, we will be sharing some information about what to expect, information about our program, and helpful resources that are available for students. During the workshop, we will share tips on how to be successful in their doctoral programs.	Via Zoom
02/18/25	5 PM (MST)	Research Designs Dr. Jim Lane	Title: Narrative Inquiry Design Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion Description: This webinar provides detailed explanations and examples for successfully conducting data analysis and writing the findings and discussion of a narrative Inquiry study. Participants may bring their examples to discuss.	Register through this link

Date	Time	Title & Presenter	Description	Details
02/25/25	5 PM (MST)	Research Tools and Skills Dr. Nicole Baker	Title: Crafting Effective Research Problem Statements Description: Identifying and making a Researchable Problem Statement	Register through this link
03/11/25	4 PM (MST)	Research Design Dr. Jim Rice	Title: Correlation Design Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion Description: This webinar provides detailed explanations and examples for successfully conducting data analysis and writing the findings and discussion of a correlation study. Participants may bring their examples to discuss.	Register through this link
03/12/25	4 PM (MST)	Academic Writing CDS Student Writing Team	This session is designed to introduce students to the practice of writing for academic purposes. It will prepare students for work in doctoral courses in which research writing is a requirement and introduces basic research writing skills including: synthesizing, paraphrase, summarizing, direct quotations, and critical thinking. Prerequisite: It will be helpful to review the following video before the session: Academic Writing (Part I) .	Via Zoom
03/15/25	9 AM (MST)	CDS Student Coffee Chat The CDS Coffee Chat Team	The College of Doctoral Studies Student Coffee Chat (SCC) is a virtual, bi-monthly event aimed at fostering student success. Each session includes a lively discussion, with like-minded people, for inspiration and guidance as students advance within their programs and beyond. Student Coffee Chat sessions are open to all active CDS doctoral students and CDS alumni.	Register via the CDS Coffee Chat Page
03/18/25	4 PM (MST)	Research Tools and Skills Dr. Nicole Baker	Title: Dissertation Guide. Description: This webinar is designed to help students learn to navigate the great resource that is the Dissertation Guide and Alignment Handbook. Participants will learn how to access the guide and will do a walkthrough to learn all of the valuable resources included in the guide. The webinar is best for students in the beginning and middle stages of writing their dissertation.	Register through this link

Date	Time	Title & Presenter	Description	Details
03/25/25	4 PM (MST)	Research Designs Dr. Mark McCaslin	Title: Grounded Theory Design Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion Description: This webinar provides detailed explanations and examples for successfully conducting data analysis and writing the findings and discussion of a grounded theory study. Participants may bring their examples to discuss.	Register through this link
04/01/25	4 PM (MST)	Research Designs Dr. Stella Smith	Title: Q Methodology Design Data Analysis, Findings, and Discussion Description: This webinar provides detailed explanations and examples for successfully conducting data analysis and writing the findings and discussion of a Q Methodology study. Participants may bring their examples to discuss.	Register through this link
04/10/25	4 PM (MST)	Mastering Doctoral Thinking and Responding to Constructive Feedback CDS Student Writing Team	This interactive session focuses on critical thinking and other skills necessary to succeed as a budding doctoral student. Participants will engage in Socratic dialogue aimed at generating thoughts and reflections on the actions and behaviors needed to successfully progress throughout each stage of the doctoral journey. Additionally, this session focuses on how doctoral learners accept and incorporate faculty feedback to promote rigor and quality in their coursework and in developing the dissertation.	Via Zoom
04/15/25	4 PM (MST)	Research Designs Dr. Jim Rice	Title: Causal comparative (EX Post Facto) design data analysis, findings, and discussion Description: This webinar provides detailed explanations and examples for successfully conducting data analysis and writing the findings and discussion of a causal-comparative (EX Post Facto) study. Participants may bring their examples to discuss.	Register through this link
04/29/25	4 PM (MST)	Research Designs Dr. Mansureh Kebritchi, Dr. Jim Rice, and Dr. Stella Smith	Title: Exploring the Essential Components of Quantitative Designs Description: Join us for an insightful webinar that delves into the key differences between essential components of various quantitative research designs. This engaging session will feature a panel of experienced researchers and methodologists who will shed light on the nuances of different quantitative approaches.	Register through this link

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